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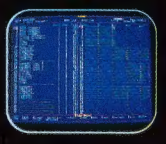

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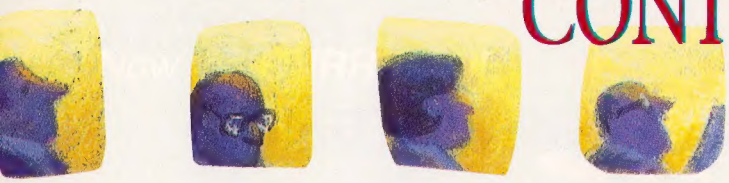

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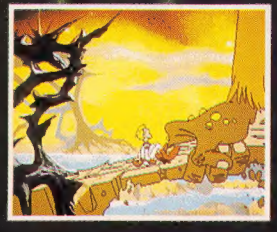

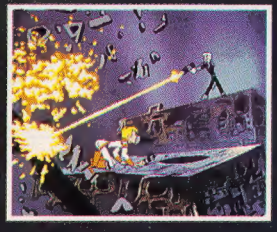

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EDITOR'S PAGE

WHATEVER SUITS YOU

When I was editor of my college newspaper, I had my first encounter with censorship. We had just put out our April Fool's lampoon issue, which was filled with ribald humor. I admit that some things in that issue were lewd; almost everything was in bad taste.

Reaction was mixed, to say the least. Some campus officials wanted to change the newspaper's bylaws to give faculty the right to approve the content of future issues. Some professors wanted me removed as editor; others wanted to remove parts of me. After days of discussion with a cool executive vice president of the college and some less-cool pedantic jugheads, things settled down. Finally, we all agreed that whether you're talking about a college newspaper, *The New York Times*, or *The National Enquirer*, you can't legislate good taste. As D.H. Lawrence once wrote, "What is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another."

College was a long time ago, but, like most journalists, I'm still sensitive to any sort of censorship. For the most part, the issue doesn't come up very often in the course of publishing *PCGames*. When it does, it's usually a question of deciding what's objectionable to our audience, the vast majority of whom are adults, rather than defining what's pornographic to the public at large.

To some, we walk a fine line with coverage of products such as Sierra On-Line's Leisure Suit Larry 5. Given that we're producing this issue on the heels of the Thomas confirmation hearings, the issues of sexual harassment and sexism in general are on everyone's mind, and rightfully so. It's a time when we're all aware of words, innuendo, and actions that may make others feel uncomfortable. But should this "sensitivity" affect how the press reports news or, more specifically, how we cover software in *PCGames*? Is Leisure Suit Larry 5 too sexist and suggestive?

Obviously, we decided that there is a place for it in the pages of *PCGames*. (See the review in this issue, p. 63, and this month's Playing the Game, p. 87.) Personally, I find Larry's humor sophomoric and prurient — that is, I kind of like it. Other staff members find it more objectionable. Feelings, however, aren't relevant. We know that many people who read *PCGames* will be interested in this product. Based on the success of earlier versions of Larry, it's safe to say that many of you will buy it.

While some of you will object, we think the greater danger is for us to try to be the arbiter of good taste. I have a friend who's an editor for a magazine whose audience is similar demographically to *PCGames*'. While focusing primarily on business, the magazine does a games roundup once a year. This editor told me she forbade the writer from mentioning Leisure Suit Larry, because she thought it was offensive. We disagree with that kind of decision. Again, we may not be talking about withholding information on arms shipments to Iran, but we think the principle is the same. We have an obligation to tell you what's available. You have a right to decide for yourself what's appropriate for you and your family.

— Dan Muse, Editor in Chief

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MAILBAG

Just for Kicks

I need your help! I've ordered games because of your editorials and reviews and I've been exceptionally pleased with my purchases. I have faith in your opinion and I rely on what you say. (It's not the bucks — it's the time I have to spend learning a game from the documentation that makes me particular about what I buy.)

Getting down to the nitty-gritty, I enjoy "thinking" games, but I also like "kick their face in" games, too — anything similar to Nintendo's Punch Out and Double Dragon titles. My Nintendo is gathering dust, and rightfully so, since I discovered IBM PC games. Any chance of an article covering good kick/punch/smash/crunch games?

I was into my fourth year of karate before I was injured and had to quit. I've seen **Budokan** and **Bruce Lee Lives** listed among the products advertised in *PCGames* — ads from companies such as Chips & Bits. I'd like to know what to buy.

I'm looking for games with more than just an occasional punch or kick. You know — realistic fighting with jabs, punches, spinning backfists, front kicks, back kicks, hook kicks, and different types of weapons, too. How about some advice?

Steve Gatewood
35 East Broadway
Brownsville, TX 78520

While PCGames *doesn't advocate violence, we don't avoid it either. Here are a few of our current favorites for those times when we feel like kicking butt:* ***4D Boxing*** *from Electronic Arts (1450 Fashion Island Boulevard, San Mateo, CA 94404, 415-571-7171, $49.95),* ***ABC Wide World of Sports Boxing*** *from Data East (470 Needles Drive, San Jose, CA 95112, 408-286-7074, $49.95), and* ***Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos*** *from Gametek (2999 Northeast 19th Street, #800, North Miami Beach, FL 33180, 305-935-3995, $39.95).*

Takeoff

Why are there so many flight simulators on the market these days? I don't dare buy one because there's always another state-of-the-art game coming out next month. To list all the flight simulators released this year would be next to impossible.

And, with every new release, prices seem to get higher and higher. The same is happening to system requirements — you have to be careful that the game you're buying will run on the type of equipment you have.

Box labels often don't show full system requirements, either. They usually list only about half of what you need, and really should also list optional equipment and incompatible devices, as well. Can magazine publishers do anything about the chaos in the world of computer games?

Colin Rogers
4746 Antler Trail
Sarasota, FL 34238

The technology is moving so fast it's difficult to keep up with it. As far as magazines go, we try to list as many system requirements as we can when we review products, both in the italicized box at the end of each review as well as in the review itself; it's difficult to list all the incompatibles, however, because of the multitude of PC clones and third-party products on the market.

Sound Support

The main reason I read *PCGames* is the review section — it helps me decide what to buy. The first thing I want to know about a game is whether it has 256 VGA graphics, and the second thing is whether it supports the Roland sound card. Please continue to include this information in your reviews and encourage vendors to include it in their advertisements.

I rarely buy any game that doesn't support the Roland card — it would have to be truly exceptional. Sound adds such an extra dimension of enjoyment to computer games that without it it's like watching a movie without the soundtrack.

Because some game designers still don't include Roland sound support, will installing an additional board such as Sound Blaster interfere with my Roland card in any way?

S.F. Peleshok
Box 1094
Vanderhoof, BC
VDJ 3A0
Canada

According to Creative Labs' Bob Hogg, it can and has been done. He also says that he has seen it not work. Apparently, some configurations could pose problems, so he suggests that you call either the ***Creative Labs*** *technical-support number, (408) 982-9226, or the* ***Roland*** *technical-support line, (213) 685-5141.*

Quarterly Results

Why is *PCGames* published only four times a year? I think it's a great magazine.

I don't subscribe to any of the other game magazines on the market, because they focus primarily on Nintendo, Genesys, and similar systems. My friends say they won't subscribe to *PCGames*, though, because they don't want to spend the money for only four issues.

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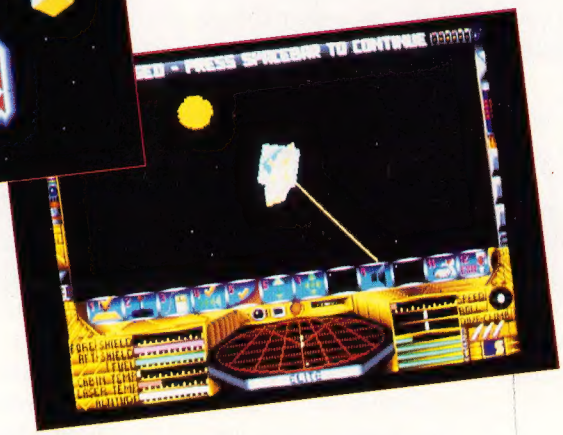
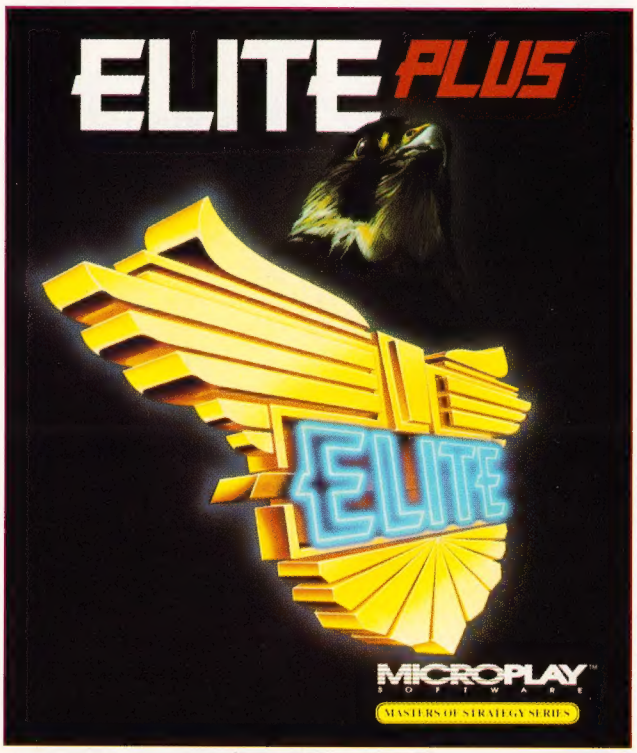


IBM screens shown. Actual screens may vary.



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Any chance you'll increase the frequency this year?

Eric Toll
1675 Satin Leaf Court
Delray Beach, FL 33445

People have said that PCGames' *frequency is like the New England weather — if you don't like it, wait a minute. Seriously, though, like any enthusiast magazine, we center our issues around the activities of our readers. We've determined that our readers want issues in the fall and winter, when products are hot. For the same reason, cross-country-skiing magazines, for instance, aren't published in the summer. If you want to see more issues of* PC Games, *by all means write and convince us.*

Lecter Lives

Any chance that someone out there is developing a PC game based on the popular book and movie *The Silence of the Lambs*?

Larry Adler
324 East 74th St.
New York, NY 10021

We don't know for sure of anyone who's developing a computer-game version of The Silence of the Lambs. *You know, Larry, that a game based on that movie would be depraved, violent, and a little bit sick . . . so* someone *must be working on it.*

Backgammon, Anyone?

In reference to A. Anderl's letter to Mailbag (October 1991, p. 6), not only is there a new backgammon game in the works for the PC platform, but some other titles have been available for a number of years. The challenge is to find them.

The first such game I acquired was **Backgammon** from Spinnaker Software (201 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139, 617-494-1200). Requiring only 128K and a CGA (mono or color) card, it's by far the simplest.

Slightly more involved is **Backgammon** from Applications Plus (15720 Harmony Way, Apple Valley, MN 55124, 612-432-5560), with similar hardware requirements, but adding the ability to customize the logic of the computer opponent (making this one my favorite).

For PC users with a little more hardware, there's **The Games People Play** from The Software Toolworks (60 Leveroni Court, Novato, CA 94949, 415-883-3000).

This title is an extension of the **Gin King/Cribbage King** package reviewed in the January/February 1991 issue of *PCGames* ("In the Cards," p. 36). It requires at least 512K to run, and offers dazzling graphics images for owners of EGA and VGA cards.

In addition to backgammon, the package also includes cribbage, gin, and checkers. Note that I've experienced trouble with this title when running it on a PC with Quarterdeck's QEMM expanded-memory manager active.

As for upcoming packages, Sierra On-Line (P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, 209-683-4468) has announced a third installment in the **Hoyle Book of Games** series, which will include backgammon as one of six board games. Animation and support for the more-popular sound boards are promised.

Finally, I'd be remiss if I neglected to mention shareware. Call a few of the major distribution houses (such as **Public Brand Software**, 800-426-3475, **Gemini Marketing**, 800-346-0139, or **Shareware Express**, 800-346-2842) for a catalogue and you'll be sure to find a few backgammon titles.

Because I can appreciate the difficulties associated with finding backgammon software for the PC, I've donated my copy of Backgammon from Spinnaker Software (complete with original disk and documentation) to A. Aderl. This program was destined for the next garage sale anyway. Enjoy!

Jon D. Kryscnski
31 Stoneheights Drive
Waterford, CT 06385

We wish we'd said that.

Burning a Hole in Your Pocket

After being in the military service for six years, I had the time to play PC games on other people's computers, but I never had the money to buy one. Now that I'm a civilian and have a great-paying job, I can afford not only a computer, but a good one.

One of the primary uses of this system will be home management, but I'll also use it (often) for PC games. I have about $2000 to invest. My question to you is this: What do I need for the applications I've mentioned?

I want a system that will run the most advanced PC games and simulators there are, and I hope the ones that'll be coming along in the future, as well.

Ricardo Cabrera
P.O. Box 1214
Isabela, PR 00662

For the price range you mention, we recommend a 386SX system with an 80-megabyte hard-disk drive, 2 megabytes of RAM (random-access memory), a VGA monitor, an AdLib or Sound Blaster sound card, and a 2400-bps (bits per second) modem. For more information on the ultimate in gaming hardware, see "Mega PC," December 1991, p. 43.

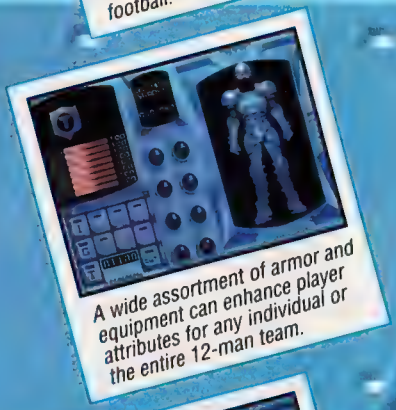
Correction

In our November 1991 issue, we inadvertently omitted the name and address of the publisher of *The Computer Gamer's Bible*. (See "Gamers' Salvation," p. 12.) The book is produced by Computer Publishing Enterprises, P.O. Box 23478, San Diego, CA 92193, (800) 544-5541.

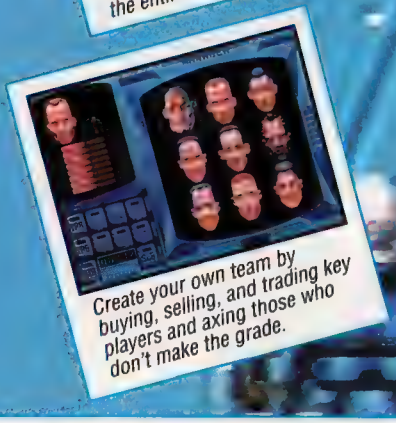
If you have comments, questions, or suggestions, write and let us know what you're thinking. We reserve the right to edit letters for clarity, style, and space. Address your correspondence to Mailbag, PCGames, 80 Elm St., Peterborough, NH 03458.

Welcome to the Terror Dome.

Speedball 2 combines the strategy of hockey, the finesse of basketball and the brute force of football.



A wide assortment of armor and equipment can enhance player attributes for any individual or the entire 12-man team.



Create your own team by buying, selling, and trading key players and axing those who don't make the grade.

In the 22nd century, there's no such thing as unsportsmanlike conduct. Because the only sport in town is Speedball 2. A vicious game of physical dominance, animalistic intimidation and reckless destruction.

But it will take much more than powerful play in the Terror Dome. You'll need to control player trades, roster changes and the acquisition of armor and equipment to turn your bunch of misfits into a well-oiled wrecking machine.

Speedball 2 is the sequel to the original, award-winning Speedball—now improved and upgraded to include:

- 16-Team League in Two Divisions
- Instant Replay of all Goals
- League, Cup, Practice and Knockout Game Modes for 1 or 2 Players
- New Player Attributes that Include Attack, Defense, Speed, Throwing, Stomping, Energy and Aggression

Welcome to the Dome Rookie.

Available Fall 1991 for MS-DOS & Amiga

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IMAGE WORKS™

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TWO NEW TURTLE THEIR OWN

The four, the proud, the green are armed and ready for action in exclusive new missions.

Manhattan will never be the same again. Shredder is bent on taking over. Today Manhattan, tomorrow the world! So he's infested the borough with a swarm of walking, stalking slime balls and sinister traps. The turtles are the town's only hope, so they must gear up to battle Shredder and his no good hoods in this exclusive new action/adventure.

Enlist the ninja know-how of Leonardo, Raphael, Michaelangelo or Donatello and put their distinct character attributes of strength, speed and energy to the test in 15 challenging missions. Two turtles can even join forces to tangle as a team in a danger zone that stretches from sewers and subways to warehouse hideouts and treacherous rooftops. You'll have to dare them all to round up clues and slice it up in the real time fight sequences before time runs out.

Training sessions with ninja master Splinter, combat, pizza and sleep are all needed to reach maximum turtle potential. Throughout your quest, the 3-D mapping system will dim and crumble to reflect the status of your mission. Side and 3/4 perspectives give you a keen view of the madness on every mission.

Manhattan is plunging toward catastrophe, so grab your best weapon and check out the latest turtle escapade. Chop-chop!

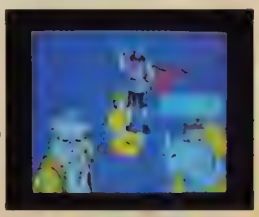
Available Fall 1991 for MS-DOS.

GAMES COME WITH HARDWARE.

Point-blank from the original arcade game — they came, they saw, they ate pizza.

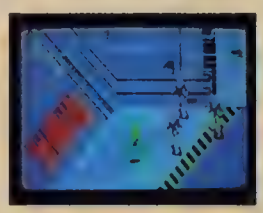
The green team is pumped up and ready for action now that Shredder's gotten his mitts on ace news reporter April O'Neil and ninja master Splinter. The perfect bait to lure the noble ninja crew into a danger filled rescue mission that'll leave you shaking in your shell and asking for seconds.

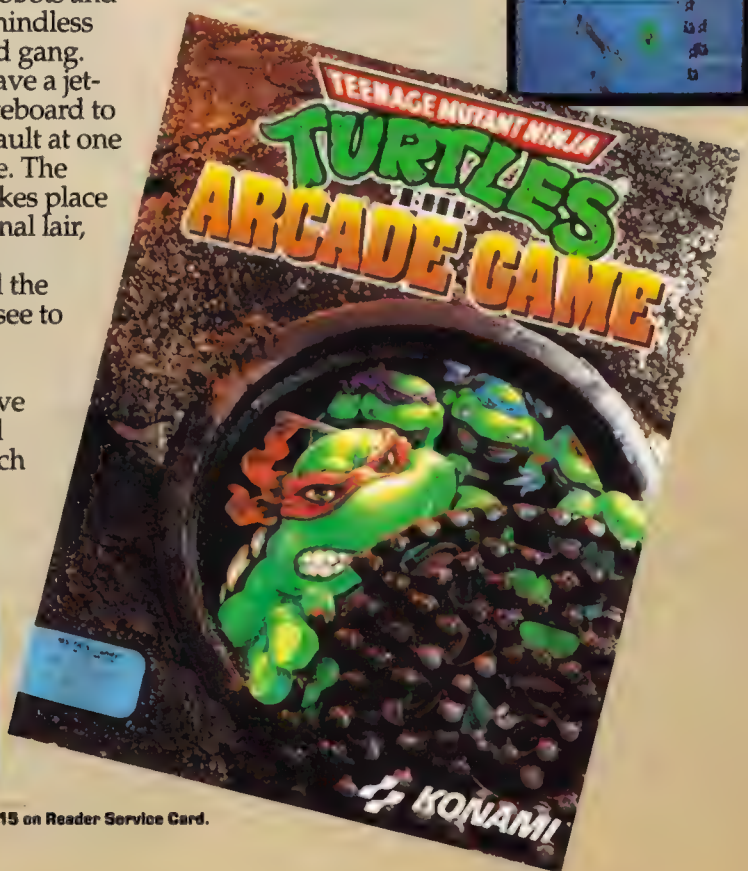
All eight challenging levels come to you straight from the original arcade game and are teeming with Shredder's toughest reptilian resistance yet, including 700 Taekwondo turtle terminators and a new more merciless breed of Foot Soldiers. But you don't have to go it alone in the cold, cruel world. Two turtle comrades can team up to simultaneously slice and dice Shredder's forces. Brave Vinnie's Valet "Stalking" Lot, the Soho Sewer System and the Rock-A-Fella Expressway as you master side kicks, flying kicks, somersaults, flips and foot sweeps to greet an onslaught of Mousers, laser armed robots and more of the mindless muscle-bound gang. You'll even have a jet-powered skateboard to speed your assault at one stage of the game. The final showdown takes place in the ultimate criminal lair, the Technodrome.



Gobble up all the pizza you can see to gain extra bonus points. Get up as much strength as possible because you've got to prove that you're more than just a stuffed shell. See for yourself just how much turtle you can be.

Available Fall 1991 for MS-DOS, Amiga and C64.





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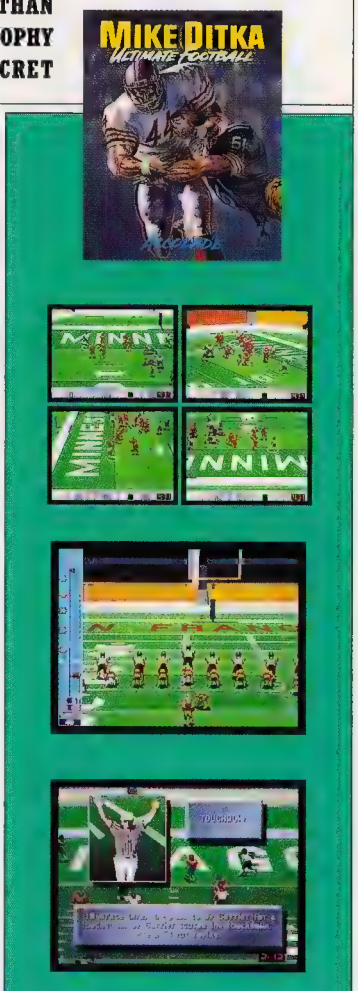
Mike Ditka Ultimate Football

"DITKA WAS OUT TO KICK BUTT AND TAKE NAMES. HE DIDN'T JUST WANT TO WIN. HE WANTED TO POUND HIS

OPPONENT INTO SUBMISSION. DON'T HOLD BACK. NEVER EASE UP. THAT'S HOW HE PLAYED. THAT'S HOW HE COACHES HIS CHICAGO BEARS." NOTHING LESS THAN THE ULTIMATE. THAT'S THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIKE DITKA. THAT'S THE SECRET BEHIND HIS NEW FOOTBALL GAME. MIKE DITKA ULTIMATE FOOTBALL,™ IS THE ONLY NEW PC FOOTBALL GAME OUT THIS SEASON. AND POUND(ING) FOR POUND(ING) IT BEATS UP THE COMPETITION. BUT HEY, DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT. CHECK OUT THE STATS FOR YOURSELF. • BIG AND BOLD 256 COLOR VGA GRAPHICS • STUNNING PLAYER ANIMATION • 28 PRO TEAMS TO CHOOSE FROM • 32-MAN ROSTERS; VARIABLE SKILL LEVELS; SUBSTITUTIONS • 4 PASSING MODES: REAL TIME OR STOP ACTION, WITH USER OR COMPUTER ASSISTED RECEIVERS • EAR POUNDING DIGITIZED SPEECH AND SOUND EFFECTS • PRACTICE MODE FOR ALL PLAYS, KICKOFF RETURNS, FIELD GOALS • BOOM FIELD GOALS WITH DITKA'S EXCLUSIVE POWER BAR™ KICKING GAME. HEAR THE CALLS OF REFEREE JIM TUNNEY, A 31 YEAR VETERAN OF THE NFL WARS. PICK APART YOUR OPPONENT WITH PLAYS YOU DESIGN OR CALL ON THE 132-PLAY PLAYBOOK. WATCH INSTANT REPLAYS FROM *FOUR* DIFFERENT ANGLES. BOTTOM LINE? DITKA DELIVERS SUPERIOR GRAPHICS, GAMEPLAY AND REALISM. TRULY THE ULTIMATE BLEND OF ACTION, STRATEGY AND TOTAL CONTROL. TO ORDER, VISIT YOUR LOCAL RETAILER OR CALL 1-800-245-7744. ACCOLADE™



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THE GAME PRESERVE

CD-ROM: SUDDENLY REAL

It'll never catch on. There's no software. It's too expensive . . . .

If those are the comments you've been making about CD-ROM (compact-disc read-only memory), it's time to adjust your attitude. CD-ROM is legitimate — or at least close to it. Recent announcements from entertainment-software companies, such as Broderbund (Novato, CA), Interplay (Santa Ana, CA), Software Toolworks (Novato, CA) LucasFilm (San Rafael, CA), and ICOM Simulations (Wheeling, IL), should get you at least thinking about a CD-ROM drive.

By the time you read this, you should be able to get a CD-ROM version of **Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?** ($79.95), featuring traditional and folk music for each location, 130 digitized photographs of 60 countries, hundreds of animation sequences, and 3000 clues (the equivalent of three regular Carmen Sandiego games, according to Broderbund).

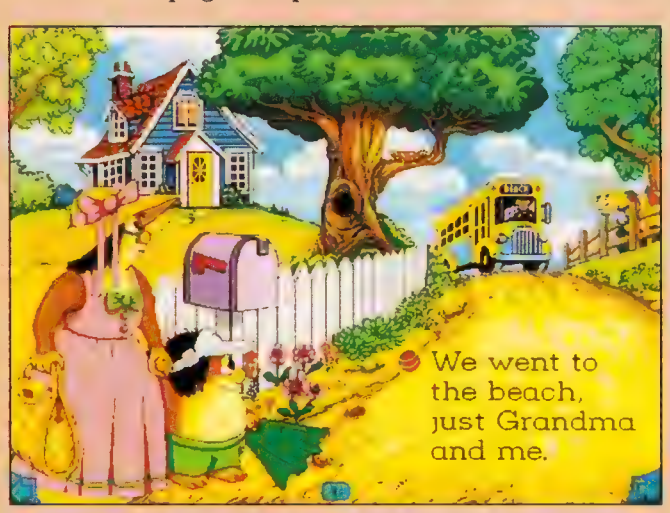
Broderbund is also releasing **Just Grandma and Me** ($49.95), based on Mercer Mayer's best-selling children's book of the same name. This interactive animated story, about a "Little Critter" and its Grandma's visit to the beach, is the first in Broderbund's CD-ROM-based *Living Book*s series. It features interactive animations and a soundtrack of talking characters, special sound effects, and music.

CD-ROM takes Broderbund's popular Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego? to a new level, with music, digitized photos, animation, and 3000 clues.

To explore Grandma and Me or other stories in the *Living Books* series, a child simply points-and-clicks on a word or phrase. Each interactive page helps reinforce reading skills by making the child an active participant, rather than a passive learner. The book is a multilingual learning experience in which children can choose to hear or play the story in one of three languages: English, Spanish, or Japanese.

For more information, contact Broderbund at (415) 382-4400.

The CD-ROM version of Interplay's award-winning **Battle Chess** (price unavailable at press time) adds life to a game that was pretty vivid to begin with. In addition to watching chess pieces come to life, you can now view an animated tutorial offering tips and a humorous history of each character. Characters also have distinctive voices, which were recorded in a Hollywood sound studio by professional talents, Interplay says.



Just Grandma and Me, from Broderbund Software, presents an interactive animated story on CD-ROM, with soundtrack and text in three languages.

Battle Chess CD-ROM contains more than 100 megabytes of graphics, an opening library of 30,000 moves, and ten levels of play. For more information, contact Interplay at (714) 545-9001.

Look for the popular adventure game **Loom** (price unavailable) to lead the way for LucasFilm's entry into CD-ROM. The disc will feature full voice and all new art and animation, according to the company. Twenty-one Loom characters are brought to life by professional actors. In addition, LucasFilm plans to introduce CD-ROM versions of **Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade** and **The Secret of Monkey Island** in early '92.

Origin Software's **Wing Commander** is winging its way to CD-ROM, courtesy of Software Toolworks (Novato, CA). The Wing Commander 3D space-combat simulator and two

ICOM Simulations' Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective CD-ROM features more than 90 minutes of full-motion color video of live actors.

new chapters in the continuing saga of the TCS *Tiger Claw*, Secret Missions 1 and 2, are packed onto a single CD-ROM disc ($129.95). The package also contains the *Mission Selector*, which lets you fly any of the 40 original Wing Commander missions against the cruel Kilrathi, plus 32 brand-new missions to challenge PC space aces. For more information, contact Software Toolworks at (415) 883-3000.

While most of the titles listed above describe the migration of popular floppy-disk-based games to the silver disc, ICOM Simulations' **Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective** ($69.95) — like Broderbund's Grandma and Me — was designed specifically to take advantage of emerging multimedia technology, according to the company. The mystery game contains more than 90 minutes of full-motion color video of live actors. According to ICOM Simulations, it's displayed at 15 frames per second with synchronized video, using ICOM's proprietary digitization process.

The game's afoot! With three cases to solve and more than 50 characters, Sherlock challenges the deduction skills of even the most dedicated mystery buffs.

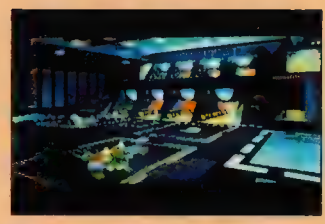
In Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective, you play the role of the famous sleuth and interact with 50 characters. Like all good detectives, you use logical-thinking skills and deductive reasoning to build your case against the suspected murderer. A nine-icon user interface helps you gather clues. For example, choosing the appropriate icon lets you consult a directory of locations, review a notebook of important names and places, view Holmes' personal file, read newspaper articles, or interview a variety of people.

The CD-ROM disc contains three full games — *The Case of the Mystified Murderess, The Case of the Tin Soldier*, and *The Case of the Mummy's Curse* — all based on Arthur Conan Doyle's character.

As with other games of this depth, Sherlock was produced like a short film. According to ICOM Simulations, a scriptwriter composed the dialogue, 25 actors were cast for 50 speaking parts, more than 70 costumes were designed, and 25 Victorian-era sets were constructed. For more information, track down ICOM Simulations at (708) 520-4440. **— D.M.**

TO THE MOON WITH ASTRONAUT BUZZ ALDRIN

Buzz Aldrin's Race into Space, from Interplay (Santa Ana, CA), gives you all the thrills, spills, and



Origin's Wing Commander CD-ROM offers 40 original and 32 new missions.

headaches of the international race for space.

Players manage a fledgling space program to become the first PC player on the moon. You can start a space program for either America or Russia. After you make your choice, the computer plays the other side or chooses randomly to play one of several European countries.

Race into Space features 50 types of missions. You determine which missions to develop first, planning short-term and long-term goals for the program. You recruit astronauts from among 140 different characters and train them. You also "R&D" all your own space hardware.

Periodically throughout the game you receive secret intelligence reports on your opponent's moon project, which you can use to direct your program. As in real life, however, the spy data isn't always correct.

At launch time you assemble your vehicle, then guide the launch from the *Mission Control* room, which displays multiple screens, crew dialogue (plus sound

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effects), digitized historical photos of real missions, and 70 animated sequences.

If you've done the right research at the right time, trained well, and orchestrated successful launches, the moon is yours. If too many astronauts or cosmonauts crash and burn, you're fired.

For more information, call Interplay Productions at (714) 545-9001. — **W.N.**

MURDER! HE SAID

Murder! The title of this game says it all. If you love vintage murder mysteries in the tradition of Agatha Christie, U.S. Gold (San Jose, CA) packs 3 million murder cases onto a single floppy disk.

In **Murder!** ($44.95) a news headline announces each gory killing. Players tailor each case to their macabre tastes by changing four variables: the year (from 1914 to 1945), the date, the name and type of house in which the murder was committed, and the difficulty level.

Changing any variable creates an entirely new case. You get two hours real time to solve the murder. Search the scene, be sure to interrogate suspects, track down clues, and select a suspect. You can even collect fingerprints.

The manual includes a casebook summarizing a dozen of the most notorious cases in the history of murder, including those of "Bluebeard" Henri Landru, Dr. Thomas Neill Cream (self-confessed Jack the Ripper), and Lizzie Borden.

To find out who dunnit, call U.S. Gold at (408) 246-6607. — **W.N.**

SHADOW SORCERY FROM S.S.I.

Shadow Sorcerer ($49.95) is the latest animated fantasy adventure in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* pantheon from S.S.I. (Strategic Simulations, Inc., Sunnyvale, CA).

You pick four heroes from among 16 characters, all Companions of Lance. According to S.S.I., the game is designed to reduce the complexity inherent in most role-play games. The combat action is fully animated in real time, and you control all four characters at once with the point-and-click interface.

You can set your characters up with predesigned strategies, strengths, and abilities before the fighting takes place. Naturally, you'll explore strange new worlds and interface with a host of fantastic beings. The Draconians still lurk around every corner, and you'll face Ember, the Great Red Dragon.

Looking for adventure? Call S.S.I. at (408) 737-6800. — **W.N.**

BO'S BACK!

Bo Jackson Baseball, from Data East (San Jose, CA), is the next program up to bat in the PC baseball league.

Products for Ear and Hand

In a case of PC-games-meet-video-games, Advanced Gravis' (Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada) PC GAMEPAD is a combination handheld video-game-like control pad and joystick for the PC.

Nintendo Entertainment System players will recognize the pad's design right away. The GamePad is a four-button joystick featuring single-shot and/or turbo fire, plus selectable button configurations for A, B, A-turbo and B-turbo, or A, B, C, and D. The unit sports a reversible axis switch, which sets play for either the left or right hand. The Pad also features a removable joystick handle, which has rubber "feet" for tabletop play. If you prefer, pull the stick off so that you can make moves with your thumb.

Advanced Gravis is now in the sound-card business, too. The GRAVIS ULTRASOUND card boasts 16-bit digital audio, with 32 synthesized voices, up to 32 digital voices, and 16 digital-stereo channels. Sound is pumped through a built-in stereo amp, which drives speakers and headphones. The card has mono and stereo recording or sampling capability. There's 64K of on-card sound memory, expandable to 1 megabyte, and a programmable speed-compensated joystick port. The UltraSound is compatible with AdLib and SoundBlaster and supports Microsoft Windows Multimedia Extensions.

For more information, call Advanced Gravis at (604) 434-7274.

— W.N.

Classics from Activision

Zork, Planetfall, Deadline, Moon Mist. Many PC gamers cut their teeth on these great text-adventure games from Infocom. Now Activision (Menlo Park, CA) has published a compilation of 20 classic titles in a new package called THE LOST TREASURES OF INFOCOM ($99.95).

And if you missed these other games (or miss them), you can now get Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, Infidel, Witness, four Zork sequels, and more, in addition to those mentioned above. Also included in the package are all the hint books and maps.

Speaking of classics, SARGON V ($49.95) is about to make its opening move. This version features an even heftier chess algorithm than previous Sargons. It sports a point-and-click interface and a stunning 3D chessboard.

The program contains all the classic moves from games as recent as Karpov/Kasparov 1990. Chess masters should also know that Dr. Danny Kopec helped design the game and that George Koltanowski explains the strategy behind some all-time great moves in the Annotated Games feature.

If your tastes lean towards the tasteless, you'll be thrilled when the Gas Pump Girls meet the Pulsating Inconvenience from Planet X in LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS 2 ($69.95). More action! More suspense! More scantily clad Earthlings!

Enough said. For more information, call Activision at (415) 617-8161.

— W.N.

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You get teams representing all the National and American League cities. You can compete against the computer or one on one versus a friend, or create a league with up to 26 players. The action graphics images feature great detail. Pitchers pitch out of the stretch, and some of them toss sidearm style. Announcers call all the plays in a digitized voice.

This Bo knows stats, too. You can create teams using 100 different player stats, rate players in four categories, and even print stats for the major categories plus 33 pitching categories and 16 hitting categories. A *Strategic Manager* feature lets players use 45 statistical categories to customize one player or an entire team.

For more information, contact Data East at (408) 286-7080. **— W.N.**

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

It was inevitable that the smash hit *Home Alone* make the move from silver screen to computer screen. After all, if macho dudes like Rambo and the Terminator can translate box-office success into software-store hits, why can't 8-year-old Kevin? He certainly has shown that he can inflict pain and suffering with the best of them; he's just a little smaller and cuter than Stallone and Schwarzenegger.

Capstone Software's **Home Alone: The Computer Game** ($39.95) uses digitized pictures from the movie, plus animation, slapstick humor, comic twists, and more.

You rush through your large home setting traps. Like Kevin, you must use ordinary household items to aid in your defense. Before you can say "Holy Cow," Harry and Marv arrive. Armed with only your imagination and a BB gun, you must thwart the bumbling burglars.

Capstone has also announced **The Taking of Beverly Hills** ($49.95), based on the movie of the same name. Like Home Alone: The Computer Game, it uses digitized photos and sounds from the movie.

For more information, contact Capstone at (305) 252-9040. **— D.M.**

OFF TO MARS

If your child would like to journey to Mars, or if you'd just like to send him or her there, **Destination: Mars!** ($59.95) from Compu-Teach (New Haven, CT) will prepare both of you for the mission.

The product is designed for kids of 11 years of age and up to young adults of 17. They become part of a space crew and must use a database, mission book, and detailed map, included in the package, to reach Mars and land the spacecraft, perfrom field experiments on the surface of Mars, and investigate mineral deposits. Compu-Teach reports that it worked with a NASA consultant to provide specifications for technical accuracy.

For more information, contact Compu-Teach at (206) 338-2002. **— D.M.**

PAINTING IS FUN

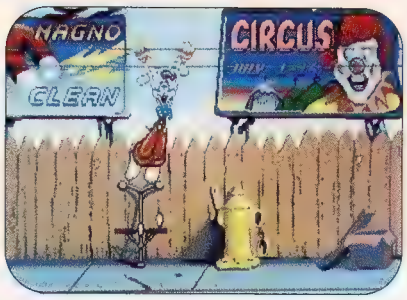
Okay, it's not a game, it's a painting program. But Broderbund's **Kid Pix** ($59.95) is as much fun as most games — especially if you're a curious young child — or just like to act like one.

With Kid Pix, young artists not only see their paintings, but hear them, too. Every brush and tool comes with a unique sound effect, from creaks and "kerchunks" to boings and booms.

A collection of more than 20 "wacky brushes" let you create imaginative, textured drawings, and experiment with tools such as "leaky pen," "echoes," and "splatter paints." Youngsters, or playful adults, can also choose from more than 100 stamp images to create anything from a simple drawing to a collage.

When you or your child makes a mistake with Kid Pix, the program is more than forgiving — it's fun, thanks to a variety of

Broderbund's Kid Pix makes creativity fun, thanks to "wacky" brushes, tools, and erasers, plus unique sound effects and happy surprises.



OH, WHAT YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH TO GET BABY HERMAN BACK.

After you've been clobbered by an ironing board, conked on the head by a rake, run over by a car, burned on a stove-top, flushed down a toilet and squeezed through a wringer, you'll find it's not easy being Roger Rabbit.

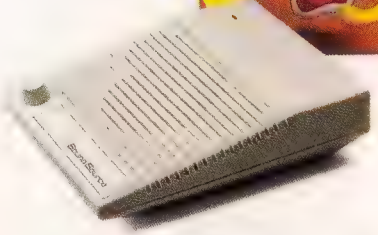
If you're lucky, you'll find Baby Herman before his mom returns, in *Hare Raising Havoc*, the first interactive cartoon.

If you fail, though, it's back to the science lab, Roger.

And it's all excruciatingly vivid, thanks to Disney's VGA animation and the incredible cartoon soundtrack, complete with character voices, music and sound effects*.

It's enough to make you a glutton for punishment.

To order: Visit your software retailer, or call 1-800-688-1520.



HARE RAISING HAVOC
from
Disney
SOFTWARE

Available for IBM and compatibles and Amiga computers. *Sound available through Disney Sound Source, Sound Blaster, PS 1 and Tandy Audio Systems. Sound Source sold in Combo Paks and separately. Works with IBM and compatible computers only. Sound Source not necessary for Amiga computers. The speech and sound technology in this product was produced under exclusive license to Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc. by Electronic Speech Systems of Hayward, CA. ©Disney ©Ambiin.

Circle 125 on Reader Service Card.

unusual erasers. For example, a "hidden pictures" eraser gradually uncovers one of more than a dozen unexpected images, including animals, insects, and other happy surprises. Another popular eraser is the "firecracker," which clears the screen in an explosive manner.

For more information on Kid Pix, contact Broderbund at (415) 382-4400. **— D.M.**

NEXT MISSION, PLEASE

LucasFilm Games (San Rafael, CA) has announced the first in its series of **Tour of Duty** disks planned for Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe.

P-38 Secret Weapons ($29.95) offers a new menu of options for the orginal game. You can fly and create missions, as well as a tour of duty, involving the P-38H and P-38J and other aircraft in the game.

For more information, contact LucasFilm Games at (415) 721-3300. **— D.M.**

DON'T PLAY, ANIMATE

Are you tired of simply *playing* games that include great animation sequences? Why not dabble in Disney-style animation with **Disney Presents the Animation Studio** ($129.95), from Walt Disney Computer Software (Burbank, CA), and learn how to use state-of-the-art techniques?

Learn from the master: The Animation Studio features Disney's "onion skin" cel animation and teaches a selection of special techniques.

The Animation Studio features Disney's exclusive "onion skin" cel animation. It lets you view up to four cels at one time, which is the way traditional Disney animation is created. The basics of cel animation are taught in an easy-to-learn fashion that will have you creating your own animations in minutes. Sample animations, including some from classic Disney movies, are included in the "library" and "morgue" sections. Also included are tutorials on animation techniques such as "squash and stretch" and "anticipation."

You can "paint" your animations in up to 256 colors from a palette of 256,000, and import PCX, GIFF, or TIFF files, among others. The Animation Studio also includes a library of sound effects that let you add audio to your animations. The program supports Disney's Sound Source as well as the Sound Blaster card and Tandy Sound.

For more information, call (818) 567-5340. **— D.M.**

With 256 colors on screen and a host of sound effects, The Animation Studio lets kids and adults alike bring their cartoons to life.

I WANT MY MPC

Ready to make the move from personal computing to multimedia? No, you don't have to throw out your PC and a buy a whole new MPC machine — not if you get Creative Labs' (Santa Clara, CA) **Multimedia Upgrade Kit**.

The package includes the Sound Blaster Pro stereo card and software, a MIDI (musical-instrument digital interface) kit, a high-performance (150K per second) CD-ROM drive, Microsoft Windows 3.0 with multimedia extensions, and five CD-ROM software products.

The CD-ROM drive is available in both external and internal versions and includes all the software and cabling necessary for an easy connection. The MIDI kit lets you connect any MIDI instrument to Sound Blaster Pro and also includes the sequencer Plus Pro, which transforms your PC into a MIDI recording studio.

The five CD-ROM discs that come bundled with the Multimedia Upgrade Kit include Windows 3.0 and *Creative Music Clips 400*; *Microsoft Bookshelf for Windows*, seven popular reference books; Creative's *SOUNDS*, professional audio clips and sound effects from Prosonus; *Jones in the Fast Lane*, a family-oriented game from Sierra On-Line; and the *Selectware System*, which contains demos and information on hundreds of software products.

For more information on the Multimedia Upgrade Kit, contact Creative Labs at (408) 986-1461. **— D.M.**

HOW'D YOU FEEL IF SOMEONE PLUCKED YOU OUT OF YOUR CHAIR, STRAPPED A ROCKET PACK ON YOUR BACK AND PLOPPED YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF A LITTLE MACHINE GUN FIRE AND FLYING NAZIS?

Throw in some brawling with storm troopers, dodging V-1 missiles and dogfighting amidst a squadron of enemy fighter planes, and you'll begin to get the feel of what it's like to be *The Rocketeer*.

And even if you make it this far, you still have to rescue Jenny from a horde of Nazi captors, while keeping the rocket pack out of their hands.

Add 256-color VGA digitized graphics of actors and actual movie sets, along with Disney's realistic speech, music and sound effects*, and the excitement gets even more intense.

Thrillseekers, hold on to your seats.

THE ROCKETEER from Disney SOFTWARE

To order: Visit your software retailer or call 1-800-688-1520.

Available for IBM and compatible computers. *Sound available through Disney Sound Source, Sound Blaster, P/S 1 and Tandy Audio Systems. Sound Source sold in Combo Paks and separately. Works with IBM and compatible computers only. The speech and sound technology in this product was produced under exclusive license to Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc. by Electronic Speech Systems of Hayward, CA. ©Disney

Circle 108 on Reader Service Card.

ROLES ON REQUEST

You're in the bedroom of a small white house. Somewhere nearby lies the entrance to the Acme Adventure. You see a window to the east, a door to the west, and a trap door in the floor. There's a computer, a disk box, and a folded piece of paper on a small table.

> READ PAPER

It reads, A Hitchhiker's Guide to Adventure & Role-Playing Games, by Peter Olafson. The paper disappears with a faint zot.

> LOOK AT COMPUTER

It's your new 386 clone. You sold all the furniture to buy it. It's currently off.

> TURN ON COMPUTER

The computer sounds like an industrial-strength vacuum cleaner as it starts, stirring up dust everywhere. A contorted face appears on screen, and the machine sprouts hairy arms and legs. Games! it squeaks. (It's using the PC's built-in speaker.) Feed me! It begins chasing you around the room.

> LOOK AT DISK BOX

You look through the tinted plastic top, and see that the box is empty. Panic grabs you like an IRS auditor on the attack.

> LOOK AT THE DOOR

It's a door, all right. Someone seems to have written on it with a sticky red liquid. The computer's gaining on you.

> READ THE WRITING

As you jog by, you see it reads Hack 'n' Slash. Must be an ad for a hardware store.

> OPEN THE DOOR

The door is locked, and you don't have the key. You wouldn't want to go that way anyway. The computer is catching up.

> LOOK AT THE TRAP DOOR

There's a mail slot in the middle of the trap door. The door itself is covered with cobwebs.

> WIPE COBWEBS

The words Text Adventures appear on the trap door.

> OPEN TRAP DOOR

It's rusted shut. You hear some vague scrabbling sounds on the other side, but the door doesn't budge. A hairy arm brushes your back. The computer is almost on you.

> LOOK AT WINDOW

It's closed. Someone has written Wash me! in the dust. Underneath that are the letters VGA.

> OPEN WINDOW

The window slides open easily.

> EAST

You slip out the window, just a breath ahead of the 386, which bangs against the wall, cursing like a sailor. The sun is coming up in 256 colors, but it's only the beta version, so who knows when the real sun will rise? Even so, it's beautiful, and you're free to move where you will.

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES GROW UP

By Peter Olafson

The sun also rises on a new generation of sophisticated adventure and role-playing games for the PC. It's a great time to be a computer traveler.

That isn't a hard drive in your computer: It's a spacecraft and time machine, with a dozen wild worlds on its itinerary. That isn't a sound card plugged into an expansion slot: It's your ears. The monitor — well, that's a window with a view.

You just can't install today's adventure and role-playing games fast enough. What's this world like? How deep is it? How am I going to get up for work tomorrow morning?

Role-playing games and graphics adventures generally haven't reached the end game yet — true role playing on the computer lies in the future, maybe one not too distant, but still the future. But these games are on their way to a better place.

Before we start on our tour of the exciting new role-playing and adventure worlds, I have a confession: I didn't get a chance to see half of what I wanted to look at. Many of the most promising games scheduled to hit the stores late this year were still under construction as this article was written. Certain titles are absent without leave from this feature; of those that did make it in, some were in less-than-finished form.

But if the games that *are* ready are any indication, your

family will see you only at meals. Short meals.

The Man in the Hat

For a taste of where adventure games are headed, boot up **Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis**, due out in January from LucasFilm.

No, this isn't a movie that was made into a game. No, you haven't missed an Indy cliff-hanger on celluloid. This is a graphics adventure. No, take that back. This graphics adventure *is* the movie. It's LucasFilm's grandest, largest, most cinematic project yet. And the version I saw wasn't even finished.

A stranger with an old statue visits the university. Indiana has a key that opens it to reveal a mysterious bead. The stranger pulls out a pistol and makes his escape, taking the artifact, but leaving behind his coat. His passport labels him as a Nazi spy. (Nazi spies are on Indy like hit points on an overmatched dungeon master.)

The Nazi also carried an old magazine that featured Atlantis expert Sonia Hapgood, one of Indy's ex-girlfriends. (They outnumber the Nazi spies in these tales.) She just *happens* to be speaking on Atlantis in New York City. The show's sold out, but the back door just might be unlocked. It's worth a try.

If you played the initial (EGA) version of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, you'll be knocked out by this title. There's simply no comparison. The VGA graphics images are startlingly realistic in many cases, and the movement is at least as flowing as that in Prince of Persia. (Indy animators used the technique of *rotoscoping* — drawing the character over videotaped images of real people — to improve realism. Look for several other adventure creators to try their hand at this technique, too.)

Fate of Atlantis sports a crisper look, as well. Icons — for both commands and objects — match the snazzy new graphics images. And while not nailed together in its preliminary version, this game promises a new sound and music system that's sensitive to the on-screen action. Even better is the promise that Fate of Atlantis will let players pick any of three separate paths (characterized by LucasFilm as *social interaction*, *classic puzzle solving*, and *action-oriented melodrama*) that diverge based on decisions Indy makes early in the game. Three games in one, to play as you prefer.

And lest you think that the story and humor have been sacrificed to the gods of high technology, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis is exactly the sort of game you expect from LucasFilm, the makers of such maniac titles as Maniac Mansion. The introduction, for instance, sends Indy plummeting through trap doors and down chutes in search of the statue — and he's only in the college's artifacts storeroom! It's the funniest thing I've seen since, well, Monkey Island II.

About a movie to match the game — LucasFilm should think it over. Maniac Mansion made it to TV, didn't it?

LucasFilm's Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis is as much a computer movie as it is a game.

The Greening of Mars

From the late 1930s, time-shift to the not-so-distant future of **Martian Memorandum**, a terrific sequel to Access Software's earlier Mean Streets.

Martian Memorandum — a post-nuclear detective story that moves from urban towers and jungle huts to the Pyramids and the Red Planet — is a tough nut to crack. Here's the scoop, flatfoot. You play Tex Murphy, private investigator. The city: San Francisco. The job: Find the daughter of a powerful man whose company is terraforming Mars, turning it into a habitable planet. You've got to travel, deal with people, and wear some thick skin. (See how well your charm works on your client's secretary, for instance.)

In some ways Martian Memorandum comes closer to the graphics adventure Countdown than to Mean Streets. In the original game there was a semblance of an environment, and you had to make a list of location coordinates and spend a lot of time flying between them. In Martian Memorandum there are no coordinates and no travel scenes; just a list of already-located people and places that's maintained and updated for you.

Martian Memorandum is an electronic detective novel. You'll search

Left, an eerie scene in the office of the man who hires you to find his daughter in Access' Martian Memorandum. Right, your first glimpse of Mars is a pretty seedy one.

rooms for hidden objects, or figure out appropriate uses for visible ones, such as that tripod by your office window. One person leads to another — if you're clever enough in your questioning — and sometimes you'll need to backtrack as new names come up. You've got to be tricky and persistent, sometimes even threatening. It's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it.

The flight-simulator segments of Mean Streets gave it a certain snap beyond the technical thrills of VGA (it was one of the early VGA games) and Access' impressive RealSound technology. But Martian Memorandum has a distinct feel of its own. There's a whole cast of characters, all appearing in digitized insets, most of them quirky-looking and animated, and many squeaking out their lines through the PC's speaker via the good graces of RealSound. Music through an AdLib board is spare and somber. There are lots of drum tattoos, which is perfect for a detective yarn.

Martian Memorandum, a ten-disk game, gives us a glimpse of CD-ROM's possibilities. It's both wild and wonderful to see a hard-boiled police detective turn his head toward the screen, then hear him snarl from the PC's speaker, "Waddaya want, Murphy?" Such cinematic techniques and PC tricks are used far more extensively than in Mean Streets, and make Martian Memorandum fun to play whether you're making progress or you're just stuck.

The only detraction is the game's help menu. Although it doesn't help you solve the most elaborate puzzles, it does give you information on virtually every object — visible and invisible — in the room. It's like giving away the store. Half the fun of an adventure game is uncovering and discovering these things for yourself.

But Martian Memorandum is a terrific time, because of both its technical expertise and its clever and complex story.

Go Graphics

Digitized graphics images are all the rage these days. They're also used prominently for cut-scenes and close-ups in Sierra's **Police Quest III: The Kindred**. This game continues the tough-minded realism of its two predecessors while adopting VGA graphics images and Sierra's icon-based control system.

The Police Quest series has always

In this closeup from SSI's Shadow Sorcerer, your party is about to face off against a pack of skeletons.

had a pleasant dynamism — a combination of gritty real-life subject matter and adherence to police procedure — that survives splendidly in the new episode. Your nemesis from Police Quests I and II is gone (you killed him off in II), but there's a new series of murders to solve. (You don't know about that at first, of course.)

You control Sonny Bonds as he fills in as sergeant, handles the afternoon briefing, straightens out an abrasive police officer, subdues a disturbed man in a city park, gets a computer-access card, and drives — once you figure out how to control the vehicle with the mouse.

Then his wife is attacked, and the evidence at the scene ties her case to what seems to be a series of murders. As long as you make the best of your office computer — it's an essential tool once the story's set in motion — you'll work through the details.

VGA is an especially good choice for Police Quest III, because it makes an already-realistic game even more thrilling and, in spots, even more emotional. Police Quest III should stay with you for a while.

Strategic Simulations has been busy, too, with **Shadow Sorcerer**, a new isometric adventuring system set in the Dragonlance world.

Shadow Sorcerer is a lot of fun, on several counts. You're not only stomping another world-beating bad guy, but also leading a party of refugees to safety. You can't think about just your party's hit points; you've got to think about the greater good of the group. And they're not following you blindly, either. When you direct the group to a particular spot, for instance, the refugees' governing council takes a vote. You have to decide how to persuade them — shades of group dynamics.

All this takes place on two types of screens: A hex-based overhead map of movement shows your party, the refugees, and your enemies (but only portions of the map you've already visited); a zoomed-in, angled-down perspective displays encounters and combat.

That's where the fun begins. There are all kinds of side trips into buildings and caves — the party of four stays in close-up mode during them all. Seen from a Populous-like perspective, these scenes are beautiful in VGA, with all sorts of nice details, objects to discover, and chummy enemies to cut down.

Command and control are fairly simple. You can make objects pop up in a small window when you click on them, you can set default actions for characters in combat, and you can summon a box of icons by clicking, so that you can direct the characters individually or *en masse*.

Shadow Sorcerer isn't a big game, not by today's role-playing standards, but it will keep you — and especially the younger adventurers among you — occupied for a good long while.

Monsters and Maladonna

A prerelease version of **Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus** made it to my desktop in time to convince me that this fantasy-horror role-playing game is a monster in more ways than one.

For one thing, Accolade claims that the final Elvira will feature 4000 locations, five times as many as the original. Three back lots — a haunted house, a cemetery, and a maze — are open for exploration as you look for the famous mistress of horror. She's presumably held in the depths of her giant movie studio by an unspeakable creature, he of the title. Monsters of all kinds are underfoot. You've got to hack and puzzle your way through the whole mess.

The original Elvira broke some new ground in role-playing games with its authentically scary and occasionally disgusting action. Elvira II keeps the tradition alive. You start outside Elvira's movie studio, ready to pay a visit to the guardhouse. It looks a little dicey in there, with signs of a struggle everywhere. Maybe you should try the closet — yikes! And inside a haunted house, I uncovered a dish only to find a head — which then *smiled* at me, and then . . . well, I won't say, you may be eating.

Everything wasn't in place yet, but

Left, this skeletal warrior — blocking your path in Accolade's Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus — looks as though he means business. Right, Accolade's Lost in L.A.: Fresh from his search for The King, Les Manley takes to the road in his search for kidnapped movie stars.

the final version will include an enemy-tracking system to prevent nasty surprises, and the ability to mix and cast more spells more quickly. It's good fun, but play it with the lights on.

And there's more of **Les Manley**. The star of Accolade's first foray into graphics adventures (The Search for the King) is now out in Lotus Land trying to solve the kidnappings of celebrities amid a whirl of cultural icons — mud wrestlers, rock stars, Maladonna, lots of digitized shots of not terribly overdressed women.

The Bow-Tie Guy roams a large and very attractive scrolling tableau of Los Angeles, with all sorts of little places to pop into to ask questions and eye the scenery. The point-and-click interface is easy to use; you won't need to type a thing.

Clickity-Clack, Typing's for Hacks

Typing is out. The text adventure is a thing of past, as companies continue to push on screen the things they once left to our imaginations. Even Infocom, the long-ago king of text, plans to release a sequel to **Leather Goddesses of Phobos** as a graphics adventure.

But there remain a number of plucky do-it-yourself designers and a handful of smaller companies that continue to push the envelope.

Legend Entertainment is one. Makers of Spellcasting 101 and TimeQuest, Legend took the old text format and dragged it into the '90s. By sprucing things up with spiffy high-resolution EGA graphics images, music, nicely digitized Sound Blaster sound effects, noun and verb menus, an on-screen compass, maps, and whatnot, Legend's extended the life span of well-written, literate, and clever adventures that depend more on your imagination than how fast your PC throws graphics around. It's a logical step from what Infocom was doing in its later games, and with former Infocom writers Bob Bates and Steve Meretzky as designers, it's every bit as fun.

The brand-new Legend adventure, Meretzky's **Spellcasting 201: The Sorcerer's Appliance**, is no exception. It's an elaborately silly story that finds you juggling the pranks required by your fraternity initiation and saving Sorcerer University. (See the PCG Reviews section in this issue, p. 76, for more information on this game.) It's all carried off by Meretzky's always-delicate humor (with a strong Infocom strain), tough but enjoyable puzzles, and some goofy spells.

You can even play it in lewd mode — shades of Leather Goddesses — and try out all the nasty things that the schoolmarmish parser wouldn't let you do before.

Hmmm . . . . Maybe that text-adventure trap door isn't shut so tightly after all. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus
Accolade
550 South Winchester Blvd.
San Jose, CA 95128
(408) 985-1700
$69.95
640K IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
(286 or faster recommended)
EGA, VGA
supports AdLib, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, Sound Blaster sound boards
mouse recommended
requires hard-disk drive

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis
LucasFilm Games
P.O. Box 10307
San Rafael, CA 94912
(800) 782-7927
$59.95
IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy sound
requires hard-disk drive

Les Manley in: Lost in L.A.
Accolade
550 South Winchester Blvd.
San Jose, CA 95128
(408) 985-1700
$59.95
640K IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
(286 or faster recommended)
EGA, VGA
requires hard-disk drive
supports all major sound boards
mouse recommended

Police Quest III
Sierra On-Line
P.O. Box 485
Coarsegold, CA 93614
(209) 683-4468
$59.95
640K IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
(286 or faster)
EGA, VGA
requires hard-disk drive
supports AdLib, Audio Spectrum, Roland MT-32, LAPC-1, CM-32L, Sound Blaster, Thunderboard sound boards
mouse recommended

Shadow Sorcerer
Strategic Simulations, Inc.
675 Almanor Ave., Suite 201
Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901
(408) 737-6800
$49.95
IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
(286 or faster recommended)
CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards
mouse recommended

Spellcasting 201: The Sorcerer's Appliance
Legend Entertainment Company/ MicroProse Software
180 Lakefront Drive
Hunt Valley, MD 21030
(301) 551-1171
$69.95
512K IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color
requires hard-disk drive
supports AdLib, Roland MT-32, Sound Blaster sound boards, RealSound
mouse optional

VIRTUAL REALITY NOW!

Boot up a simulation on your PC

and get a front-row seat on the past, present, and future.

By Bernie Yee • Illustration by John Berg

Virtual reality wasn't created by that guru of cyberpunk, William Gibson. It's been around a long time.

Simulations — a bit more serious a name than *games* — let you experience computer-controlled environments from the safety of your chair. One moment that world might be a noble's domain in medieval England. The next moment it might be the landscape of a tribal community. The next, and it's the grass in your backyard. Blink, and it might change to the depths of space. Anything's possible — especially when you have Interplay's **Castles**, MicroProse's **Civilization**, Maxis' **SimAnt**, or A.R.C. Software's **Dance of the Planets** on your PC screen. No matter what form a simulation takes, you can lose yourself in a virtual reality today, not tomorrow. All you need is a PC.

Mi Castle, Su Castle

In Castles you play the part of a king who's out to build his dream house. Getting it finished and, more importantly, holding on to it require expert management of revenues, labor, resources, and conflict. You can choose a realistic

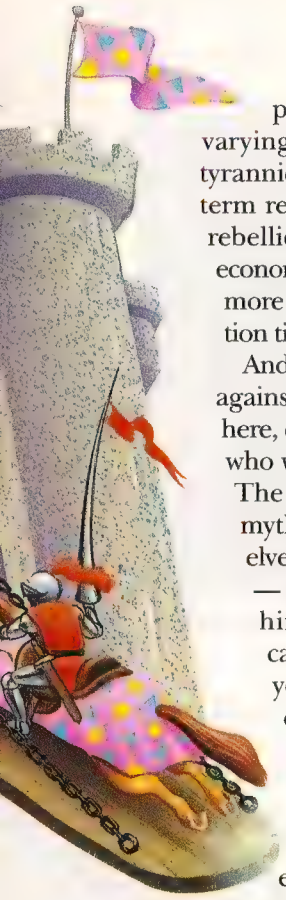
route, one in which you contend with unruly peasants, backstabbing lords, and an ideologically correct Church (all the things a ruler in the Middle Ages had to live and work with), or you can play in a fantasy world in which your troubles more closely resemble those you'd encounter in Might & Magic III. It's up to you to pick your own virtual reality.

You can play a single castle game or manage up to eight different castles in the campaign option. Plan the castle blueprint with your mouse, joystick, or keyboard — the manual serves as a primer for castle design. Allocate workers to their tasks, whether that's raising walls or building the keep, and watch as the VGA workers scurry around your monitor sawing and hammering away. This view's like watching an ant farm, as you see scaffolding rise, stones go up in place, and accidents occasionally befall the construction worker.

Interplay has infused Castles with wonderful attention to detail — the research shows. Once you've settled on a site, you command

Interplay's Castles lets you watch as the building progresses — scaffolding, peasant workers, and all.

several classes of workers, each with different skills and wages. Diggers come relatively cheap, for instance, but metal workers demand more money. Funding this public building



project requires taxes, which can be set at varying levels. Burden the population with a tyrannical taxation rate and you'll reap short-term rewards, but you may also bring about a rebellion. What a bloody twist to supply-side economics! You've got to balance the benefits — more efficient workers and a shorter construction time — against the evils of the heavy hand.

And what good's a castle if you can't defend it against a barbarian horde? Well, no barbarians here, only Celts (or ogres in the fantasy setting) who will wage war on you from time to time. The fantasy setting is true to Anglo-Saxon myths of the time, complete with fairies and elves. You'll have to hire archers and infantry — the bigger your castle, the more you can hire. When the enemy comes to your castle, you have the option of deploying your forces. Watching combat is a special experience. The bird's-eye view and your ability to control each character give you a heady, godlike feeling.

Although there are set elements with which to contend, such as stocking enough food for an extended siege, other less-precise variables come into play. Diplomacy is one. The noble families of Albion (your kingdom) have their own loyalties and agendas, which aren't always in line with the throne's. Successful completion of any Castles campaign demands that you take everything into consideration, not just the logistical hurdle of castle building.

Castles' documentation is excellent, and the simulation — or *sim* to those in the know — includes a tutorial that guides you painlessly through the interface as it shows you how to build a basic castle. Scott Bennie and the rest of the Interplay team have done their homework — there's even an accompanying bibliography that's heavy on castle-building books.

But while Castles is fun to play and watch, it seems that as a simulation there should be more to do. The combat system is too simplistic — much less detailed than the castle-building routines, for instance. Interplay plans to roll out additional Castles disks to improve the combat, but if you want to get your hands in the mortar now, Castles is light-hearted fun. If only it were more.

Get Civilized

Sid Meier hit both critical and commercial pay dirt with Railroad Tycoon, his simulation of rails and empire making. **Civilization** is a sure bet to follow, if not exceed, its predecessor.

Civilization is wildly addictive. Re-creating the rise of civilization from pastoral people to planetary polluters, Civilization is easy to learn, thanks in large part to its point-and-click interface. You choose the number of competing computer-controlled nations (up to seven) and the difficulty level, and your computer manufactures a world to master.

Your first icon is a covered wagon that represents your wandering band of settlers. It's situated near a prime city site. There's on-line, context-sensitive help that suggests good places for roads or other city structures. When you settle your first town — the capital of your burgeoning empire — the game really begins. You allocate your resources and population among various choices, from city improvements and military expansion to wonders of the world and scientific advances. Military units can fortify cities, explore the new world, and invade neighbors. All factors are interrelated, affecting your economy, citizen contentment, and eventually the environment and your neighboring nations. Imagine the delight when my Chinese civilization conquered the real-life imperialist British, turning the tables on history.

Civilization covers almost everything — from different styles of government and their effects on your nation to a cure for cancer. Monarchy, for example, lets you conduct campaigns without a meddling Senate, but democracy gives you greater economic might. A cure for cancer is bound to increase your people's happiness. And each achievement is predicated on developments you've already made — a manufacturing plant requires robotics and industrialization, which in turn requires electricity, invention, and steam power.

Your civilization must come up with these advances to thrive in this competitive world. That means developing an iron age, steam power, and nuclear energy. But you must encourage industrialization without risking global warming. Similarly, you must maintain food output for a growing population. Inevitably, your expansion is limited by other nations' expansions, so you face another decision — co-exist peacefully or let slip the dogs of war. Of course, as most tin-pot dictators have learned throughout history,

A Civilization-eye view of the known world, courtesy of MicroProse.

it's tough to fight a war on more than one front; sometimes it's best to just back down and sign some peace treaties.

Eventually, you'll turn your attention to the stars. As you develop wishful advances such as fusion power, you can push forward a space-colony program that's designed to settle an inhabitable planet in the Alpha Centauri star system. When you reach this stage, you win, though you can continue to conquer any remaining neighbors.

Civilization is playable at easier levels, where outright military expansion is viable. When you up the difficulty level, you've got to consider your alternatives much more seriously. This isn't a true simulation of civilization, because certain elements such as combat and politics are over simplified. It was horrific, if dated, to watch the Russians launch a nuclear strike against one of my cities, and then demand that we enter a peace treaty. And Civilization almost begs for a multiplayer version.

Any criticism aside, this sim is a dazzling reminder of substance over form. Occupying less than 2 megabytes on your hard drive, MicroProse makes the point that you don't need speech, digitized sound effects, and half your hard-disk drive to capture your imagination. Simply put, Civilization is a shining example of elegant and imaginative game design. Buy it — the program's destined to become a simulation classic.

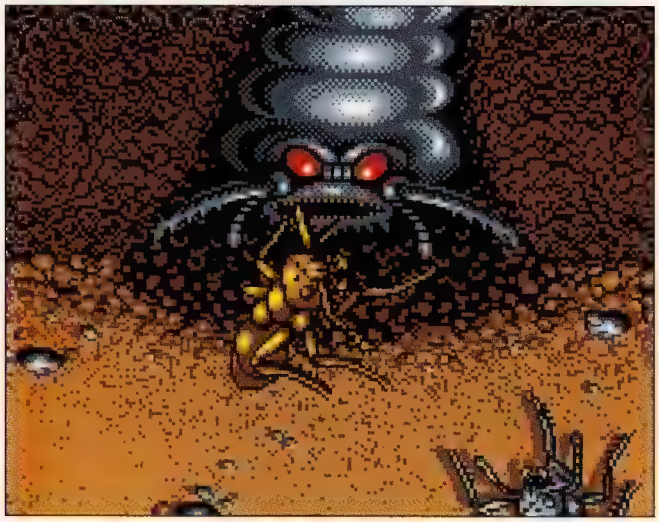
King of the Ant Hill

Some designers lighten up and turn out sims that bind pure game play to a simulation framework. That's a good description of SimAnt, a simulation based on *The Ants*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Harvard biologists Bert Holldobler and E.O. Wilson. While most wildly successful sims of city management and planetary engineering go for the big picture, SimAnt lets you run something you can easily find in your own backyard — an ant hill.

You may pay little attention to those tiny black ants, but their world is actually an incredibly complex dynamic that walks nature's fine line between elegance and simplicity. In this sim you command a black ant that's exploring a yard that's full of perils. Your own colony is matched by a rival red-ant colony that's competing for the same food resources. Ants navigate by a pheromone trail, a Hansel-and-Gretel-like scattering of scents that your ant lays down. The others, the ants without benefit of human control (and, we hope, with some intelligence) follow that pheromone trail right to the food.

The yard is filled with obstacles only an ant can appreciate. Your ants can engage the reds, leaving a battlefield with curled-up ant husks, or defend themselves against other predatory insects that forage for their food — you. Moving up the evolutionary chain, the full game expands to the entire backyard and includes a roving boy and his dog. Both patrol the grounds near the house, but sometimes venture afield with footstep and paw to wreak havoc. Still, the benefits of getting past the guards isn't insubstantial, for you can invade the house, where a kitchenful of food awaits.

The ant nest looks like those cut-away views associated with plastic ant farms. At the center of it all is your queen, busy laying eggs. As in any good sim, there are resources to manage. Aside from gathering the food and returning it to the nest, a would-be ant mogul must figure out the caste structure of the colony: You must determine the number of soldiers, foragers, and workers to produce.



Ant life is often nasty, brutish, and short in SimAnt, Maxis Software's depiction of colony dynamics.

An experimental mode lets you play an ant deity, so that you can tinker with the landscape, colony population, and food source. You work in a Windows-like interface with impressive VGA graphics. The manual is chock-full of ant information to guide your colony.

The same people who thought SimEarth was too ambitious may conclude that SimAnt is too simplistic. That's an unfair assessment, though. SimAnt is an engrossing simulation of life, complicated but fascinating, that accurately models insect behavior on the PC screen. What do you get out of such a sim? A lot of fun and a better appreciation of what it takes for an ant to reach your refrigerator.

Last Dance

Dance of the Planets is easily the most esoteric and unusual entry in this sim sweepstakes. It's hard to classify this product as a game, or even as a game/simulation, but it's definitely an entertaining tour for anyone with an interest in the heavens. Critically acclaimed by the science press, it has tremendous entertainment and (gasp!) educational value.

Dance of the Planets is a

simulation of the solar system — not just the nine planets, but the more than 6000 known bodies in the system, plus over 9000 stars and other deep-sky objects. You can view these objects from any perspective and at any time from 4680 B.C. to 10,000 A.D.

Planets have correct surface detail, right down to the shades of Mars and Earth, and the Great Red Spot on Jupiter. Worlds even rotate in animated displays. You can plot asteroids and comets, examine the effects of gravity on these chunks of iron and ice, or trace the constellations and view the night sky without worrying about a stiff neck — all while identifying objects with just a few keystrokes.

Dance of the Planets' options and scientific accuracy are astounding. This detail takes its toll in speed, though. On a 16-megahertz 386SX, Dance runs just plain slowly. If you want to see this program from its best side, you need the recommended math coprocessor.

A hefty three-ring binder serves as documentation and guides you through several tours of the solar system. The manual also acts as a basic primer in astronomy, as it discusses such topics as Kepler's Laws and Newtonian gravity. You don't have to understand these theories to appreciate the Swiss-watch accuracy of A.R.C. Software's model — but it's nice to have them there in case you want to explore the meaning behind planetary motion.

Dance of the Planets has that slow, languorous quality you associate with the stars. Dance also makes you appreciate a true simulation's complexity. There are no dice to roll, resources to manage, or goals to achieve, but it does mimic actual physical laws. It turns your VGA monitor into a space telescope, a roving eye among the incredible complexity and elegant simplicity of our solar system.

A close-up of Saturn is just a keypress away in A.R.C. Software's Dance of the Planets.

Although its price may keep all but the most-interested astronomy buffs at arm's length, Dance of the Planets' accuracy and completeness make it a fascinating example of what a PC can do with a world of virtual reality.

Final Notes on Faking It

Simulators try to put you in a place where you can't possibly be — a castle on the frontier of Wales, at the helm of a proto-empire, deep in an ant hill, or beside an instrument-packed spacecraft roving the solar system.

It's easy to argue that sims offer the best value of any computer entertainment. After all, you can replay them over and over and never end up with the same experience. They have a way of mesmerizing any player who wants a front-row seat on the past, present, or future.

Which begs the question: When does a game end and a simulation begin? Luckily for us, that line is getting blurry. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Castles
Interplay Productions
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Santa Ana, CA 92704
(714) 549-2411
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Sound Blaster sound cards, Tandy sound
mouse recommended

Civilization
MicroProse Software
180 Lakefront Drive
Hunt Valley, MD 21030
(301) 771-1151
$59.95, $69.95 VGA
640K IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
(286 or faster recommended)
EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Roland,
Sound Blaster sound boards
requires hard-disk drive
mouse recommended

Dance of the Planets
A.R.C. Software
P.O. Box 1974
Loveland, CO 80539-1974
(303) 663-3223
$195
640K IBM IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible
(386SX or faster recommended)
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math coprocessor, hard-disk drive
recommended

SimAnt
Maxis Software
Two Theatre Square
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Orlinda, CA 94563-3041
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GAMES WITH A VIEW

Is Windows 3.0 the biggest shelfware success ever, or will the entertainment market give this interface the shot in the arm it needs? Give these new games a try, then decide for yourself.

Everything's coming up Windows these days. Step into a computer store, pick up a few things, and you'll probably find a free copy of Microsoft's Windows 3.0 — the most popular graphical user interface (GUI) for the PC — firmly attached to at least one of your purchases. But though millions of people own copies of Windows 3.0, analysts believe that few are actually using those copies day in, day out.

But what does that mean for you, the avid gamer? Well, those estimates almost doused what may be the hottest new gaming environment we've seen yet. Fear that Windows buyers were in a look-but-don't-touch state of mind sent big-name publishers scurrying for cover. After all, why sink money and time into developing games for an operating environment no one really uses? But Microsoft believed in Windows, and it was convinced that a Windows 3.0 entertainment market existed. And the company was right. Microsoft's Entertainment Pack for Windows 3.0, a group of simple and graphically engaging games, shot straight into the Top 10 list, quickly selling more than 100,000 copies. The collective ears of the major computer-game publishers perked right up, and they started scrambling to get something into the market.

By Richard Sheffield * Illustration by Steve Johnson

Why Windows?

But what does Windows 3.0 bring to the gamer? "From a programmer's point of view, Windows doesn't buy much," says Ken Williams, founder and president of Sierra. "But from a consumer's view, the consistent interface buys a lot, especially for a novice."

On the technical side, Windows is yet another layer insulating you from the horrors of DOS — another layer that slows the machine and the software. That may not concern Sierra, say, a company that deals in power-miser adventure games, but for a developer such as MicroProse, for instance, a company whose bread-and-butter is in the speed-hungry simulation market, Windows may ask too much.

The MPC Explosion

There's a brand new kind of game in town (it's based on compact discs) that may blow the Windows entertainment market wide open. In an almost unprecedented move, computer hardware and software manufacturers agreed on a set of standards before a technology gained a consumer foothold. (Usually standards are among the last things this business worries about.)

The new MPC (multimedia personal computer) trademark will soon take the guesswork out of buying CD-based computer hardware and software. If your system and peripherals meet MPC standards, any software sporting the MPC logo will run on your PC. No more worrying about RAM requirements, graphics adapters, and sound-board support. Just plug and play.

The good news is that all MPC software must be compatible with the Windows interface. And there's plenty of software ready, or almost ready, for the market that may finally take PC game play to that promised land of interactive entertainment.

Sierra is one MPC power. It plans to release MPC versions of KING'S QUEST V and SPACE QUEST IV, among others, all with audio compact-disc-quality soundtracks and talking characters. The MPC version of Interplay's BATTLECHESS features talking chess pieces and an in-depth animated chess tutorial. Access is finishing an MPC version of LINKS that includes a helicopter fly-by of the entire course. And the MPC version of Maxis' SIMCITY offers enhanced graphics images, context-sensitive hyper-help, and possibly an on-line version of one of the SimCity hint books.

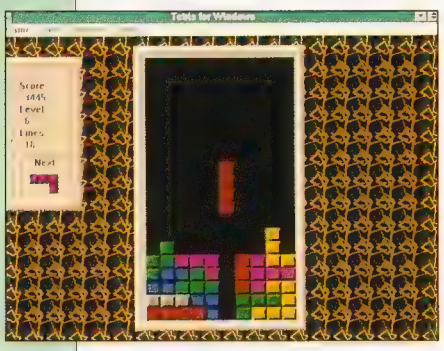
Until Microsoft corrects some of the performance limitations of its interface, disk-based Windows software may remain in the desktop-entertainment ghetto. But with Windows making headway as the standard operating environment for CD-ROM, publishers will be forced to find a way to make their games work with the interface.

This MPC carrot will push inventive programmers into finding ways to speed up CD-ROM Windows software. As they do, they may well stumble onto methods to improve the performance of disk-based Windows games, too. And that would be great news for GUI gamers everywhere. — R.S.

But despite the performance problems, veteran game designer Chris Crawford (Balance of Power, Patton Strikes Back) likes the idea of designing for a consistent interface: "To take a beautiful mouse interface and kludge a keyboard-only system onto it is a pain, but publishers insist on it because not everyone has a mouse."

Even with its limitations, the consistent, mouse-driven, and visually appealing graphical user interface — which describes Windows to a T — is certainly the future of personal computing. New users don't want to learn the intricacies of loading a program from a C prompt any more than they want to learn how to dial the correct frequencies for their favorite TV programs. They want to point and click, and let the machine figure out the rest.

Still, if software designers have learned anything during the last ten years, it's that no one system or interface is perfect for every program. This is certainly true of Windows 3.0. An enhancement for one game sometimes serves only to slow down another. Whether or not developers choose to produce games that run with the complete Windows interface or simply launch from a Windows icon is currently a matter of great debate. It's no surprise, then, that as we look at both new and upcoming Windows games, we'll find some publishers going one way, some the other, and a few heading in both directions at once.



Tetris, the anchor of Microsoft's Entertainment Pack for Windows.

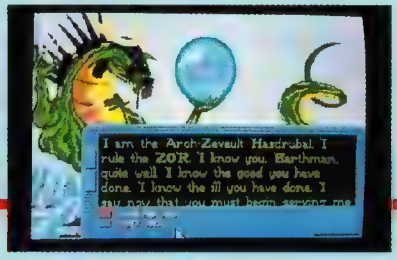
The Line-Up

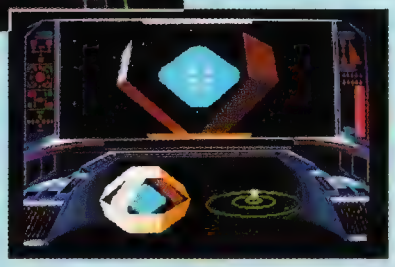
A good software development rule of thumb is to not change technology and functionality simultaneously. That is, don't write brand-new software for an operating system you've never used. Keeping this in mind, most game makers are busy converting existing best-sellers to Windows format rather than starting from scratch. As a result, many of the games now available are probably familiar, and maybe even old friends.

Microsoft realized it had a good thing going with the first **Entertainment Pack for Windows 3.0**, and so is releasing two more volumes. **Volume II** features the LucasFilm hit Pipe Dream, and includes two more solitaire-style games, a Tai Pei-like game called Stones, three beat-the-clock games, a program that converts any bit-mapped graphics image to an on-screen jigsaw puzzle, and a handful of new screen savers. **Volume III** promises still more of the same.

Industry leader Sierra is making an irreverent entry into the Windows market with its **Laffer Utilities** package. Designed as a spoof of Norton Utilities, a popular hard-disk and data-recovery program, Laffer Utilities has

"Aliens approaching... fightercraft launched."


I am the Arch-Zevault Hasdrubal. I
rule the ZOR. I know you, Earthman,
quite well. I know the good you have
done. I know the ill you have done. I
say now that you must begin serving me.



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Larry Laffer (hero-nerd of the Leisure Suit Larry series) pushing a collection of "non-productivity" programs. Featuring risqué clip art for fax cover sheets, signs, banners, and program icons; special databases for jokes, betting pools, and lunch stops; and an executive decision maker, this product tosses in tools you can use to do the things you know you shouldn't. Most other Sierra releases should be available at least with a dual boot system by early next year. You'll be able to boot a Sierra game from either DOS or Windows.

Disney Software is stepping into Windows development with only one foot. Its new programs won't run in a window, but they will be Windows friendly: You can launch them from within Windows by clicking on an icon. New products include **Mickey's Memory Match**, games based on the movies ***Dick Tracy*** and ***The Rocketeer***, and **Animation Studio,** a super cartoon-creation package that may prove more popular with adults than with youngsters.

Maxis, the company that built a brand-new form of computer game with SimCity, is high on Windows. Its first Windows release is a conversion of **SimEarth**, a planetary simulator that lets you guide the evolution of a randomly generated world from the origin of life to the development of civilization. SimEarth should be followed early next year with a Windows version of the award-winning game **SimCity**. Upgrades are available to owners of the DOS versions for only $19.95. Both SimEarth and SimCity for Windows will feature multitasking, on-line hypertext help, and multiple windows. Maxis also has plans to convert its Macintosh game **RoboSport** to Windows. This robot-battling simulation lets you program mechanical men and match them against the enemy in a variety of settings. You can play RoboSport one on one or as part of a team, over either a modem or a network.

Maxis adds windows to SimCity's point-and-click interface and excellent graphics.

Origin Systems bucks the trend and plans as its first Windows release a new game in a new (for Origin, anyway) category. **Next Frontier**, scheduled for a spring release, is to be Windows compatible. Origin's first entry into the systems-simulation market, Next Frontier sets you in the year 2017. You build a space empire by trading with various space stations and settlements — it sounds suspiciously like Space Railroad Tycoon. Based on solid scientific projections and models, Next Frontier should be both informative and entertaining.

Masque Publishing (formerly MicroAce) was one of the first into the Windows market with **ChessNet**, an excellent chess game that runs under Windows and allows quick and easy connection over modem or network. Masque will follow that success with **MicroAce Blackjack**, a game featuring strategies developed by computer genius and blackjack expert Julian Braun, and **Video Poker**, a program that can teach you the ins and outs of the game that's rapidly replacing slots in casinos. Both Blackjack and Video Poker will run under Windows 3.0.

Access Software has no trouble deciding which of its games moves first to Windows: Its superb golf simulation, **Links**, is a perfect match. This Windows version puts the game in one window, the scoreboard in another, and an overhead shot of the current hole in a third. Links for Windows should catch on with the business set like a brush fire. You can keep it in the background while working applications in the foreground.

Interplay was also quick to convert its **BattleChess** to Windows. One of the most entertaining chess games around, BattleChess animates the playing pieces, then puts on a show for you when one piece captures another.

While most of MicroProse's simulations don't fit well into the Windows environment, the company does have two natural candidates. **Railroad Tycoon** should be its first Windows conversion. This railroad simulation has all the complexities of building an empire, and the multiple-view play system seems well suited to a graphical user interface such as Windows. Sid Meier's new game **Civilization**, in which you create a culture and see it through the test of time and a few familiar adversaries, will also be converted to Windows.

Spectrum HoloByte may be known as the publisher of such state-of-the-art aircraft simulations as F-16 3.0, but it also publishes the Russian import Tetris, the anchor of Microsoft's first Windows Entertainment Package. This success led to the development of **Super-Tetris**, which is getting ready to début in a Windows version.

MPC Plain and Simple

If you think you'll need to overhaul your system to make it MPC (multimedia personal computer) ready, you may be jumping to conclusions. MPC's demands may not be all that tough to meet.

The minimum hardware and system requirements needed to meet MPC specifications are as follows:

- **a 10MHz 286 or faster IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible**
- **2 or more megabytes of RAM**
- **a 30-megabyte or larger hard-disk drive**
- **VGA (4-bit or 8-bit) display and card**
- **an MPC-certified digital sound card (Sound Blaster meets the specs)**
- **an MPC-certified CD-ROM drive**
- **a two-button mouse**
- **serial, parallel, MIDI, and joystick ports**
- **Microsoft Windows 3.0 with Multimedia Extensions 1.0**

Your current computer may need only minor updates and the addition of a CD-ROM drive to be MPC ready. In fact, several companies are betting on that, and offering complete MPC upgrade kits for less than $1000. — R.S.

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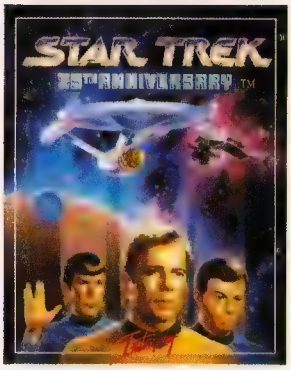

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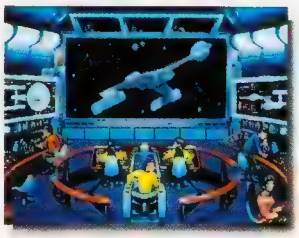

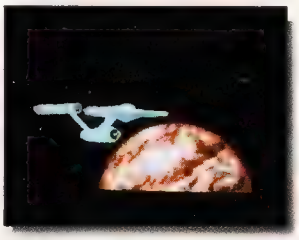

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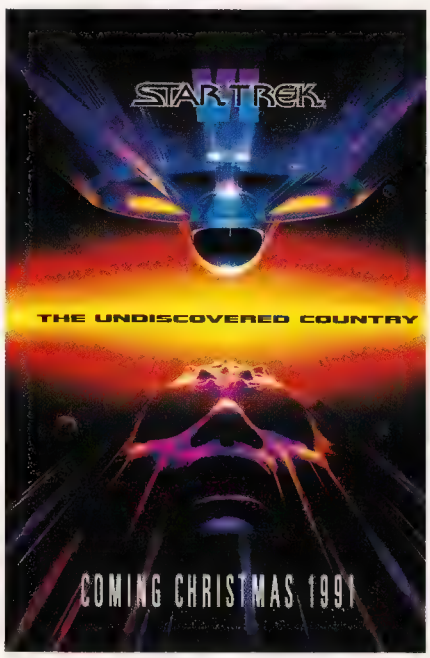

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A Whole New Ball Game

Windows' biggest benefit to game players is its multitasking capability. The ability to jump out of a word-processing program and into a quick game (then back to work again when the boss shows up) offers the kind of mental-health break that many computer users really want.

The best Windows games will let you play in short rounds or in small chunks, so that you can go back to work when you want; they'll draw you into the game quickly, so you can feel the excitement even if you don't have long to play; and they'll have simple rules or be based on familiar concepts, so that you can dive into the game almost immediately, without studying a manual.

Most game publishers have come to similar conclusions about the kinds of games that work in the Windows environment. Whatever you call them — executive stress busters or desktop entertainment — these short, simple games will continue to dominate the Windows entertainment market for quite some time to come. ❑

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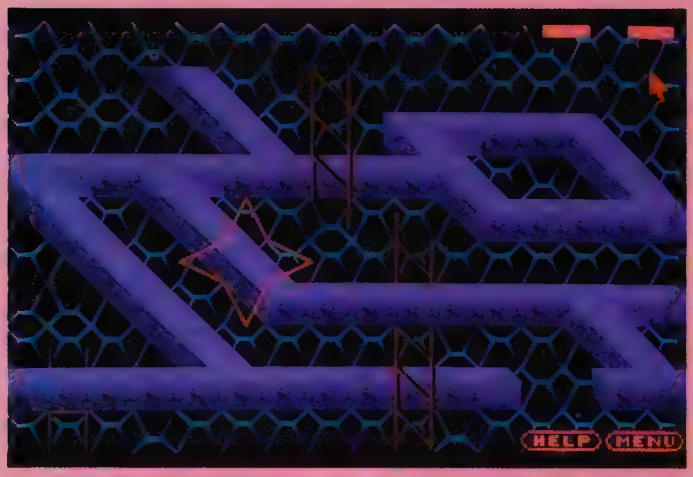

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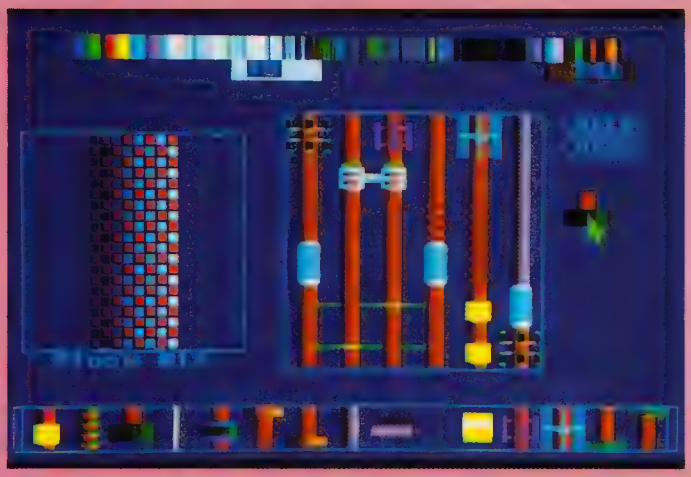

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THE GAMES: WINTER CHALLENGE

By Jordan Gold

IF YOU'RE A TRUE WINTER-sports fan, you'll be glued to your television set next month as you watch men and women hurtle down steep slopes, leap high above ice, and slam pucks into goals. The grandeur of the 1992 Winter Olympics, coming to you from the Alpine beauty of Albertville, France, is just a heartbeat away.

You can get a jump (literally) on the event right now, simply by sitting down at your PC and playing Accolade's The Games: Winter Challenge, one of the most breathtaking simulations of winter sports this side of St. Moritz. Featuring 256-color VGA graphics, digital sound, digitized bit-mapped images, and 3D realism, The Games: Winter Challenge is an excellent and exciting way to spend those cold, winter nights.

Athlete's-Eye View

This collection features eight Winter Olympic sports — bobsled, luge, cross-country skiing, speed skating, ski jumping, giant slalom, downhill, and biathlon. The action is incredibly realistic. In fact, the program uses material that's been captured digitally from live video footage of actual athletes performing in these events.

You experience the thrills and spills from the perspective of an athlete in the center of the screen (called the *Action Window*). On your left, a *Course Overview* displays the sport's course layout and tracks your progress through it. A *Judges Panel* lists the event name and tournament record, while the *Performance Display* registers time, speed, distance and/or athlete energy level, depending on the event.

The athlete's-eye view makes you feel like a participant, not a spectator. As you get better, you can feel yourself moving faster. Master the turns in luge, for instance, and the speed takes your breath away.

Crash sequences add to this "you are there" feeling. Put your skis down at the wrong time in the ski jump, and you tumble down the hill, looking like a reproduction of that agony-of-defeat skier on *Wide World of Sports*. If you move to the wrong side of the wall in the luge or bobsled, you'll end up face down in the snow with your luge or bobsled on top of you. Move too high up the wall, and you'll actually crash over it.

Detail, too, helps you suspend disbelief. With its 256-color VGA graphics images, The Games: Winter Challenge paints snow, mountains, ski lifts, and trees so realistically that you'll think you're watching instant replay, not a computer game. And if your computer bogs down while putting those scenes together, you can easily reduce the level of detail.

Digital sound effects seal the deal. Install a sound board, and you'll hear scraping sounds over snow, groaning sounds when you foul up, and even a starter's "Set, go!" during speed skating.

The Games: Winter Challenge

Speed skating tests your PC skills.

Your athlete's-eye view puts you right on the slopes of the giant slalom.

Tough Training

Like the real Olympics, each event in The Games: Winter Challenge is difficult to master. Each also requires different skills. For instance, luge and bobsled demand dexterity, knowledge of the course, steering ability, and a great deal of nerve. Speed skating requires hand/eye coordination and wicked strong legs. And cross-country skiing puts your endurance, speed, and skill to the test.

But before you're ready for the real thing, you've got to practice, just like the actual athletes. You're wise if you spend time in training mode, which lets you practice each event as long as you want. Chart your progress by viewing an instant replay of your last try, or save your best efforts and watch them later. You can also look at a chart

that lists all your times in the event for the current training round.

When you're ready for the Olympics, end the training and start the competition. You compete in a field of ten contestants — human or computer controlled — from countries around the world. You get one turn at each event.

The computer is a formidable opponent in The Games; I finished a distant last in most events, though I did manage to win in cross-country skiing, somehow setting a new record in the process. To see how you're doing at any point, look at the standings menu. The tournament ends with closing ceremonies and a fireworks display.

If you get stuck at any point, check out the manual. It includes the history and rules of each event, plus tips for best performance.

The Games: Winter Challenge gives you an added appreciation of the competition the real Olympians will soon go through in Albertville.

Be careful, though, this game is addictive. Oh, and be sure to wear a jacket. Your PC may throw a snow flurry or two at you while you're playing.

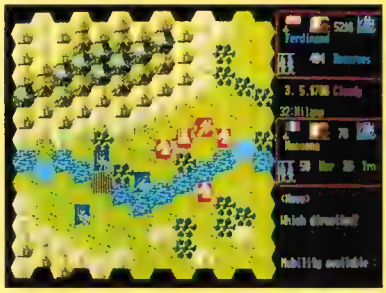
Accolade, 550 South Winchester Blvd., San Jose, CA 95128, (408) 985-1700; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible, 10MHz 286 or faster recommended; 640K RAM; EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; requires hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, Sound Blaster, Thunderboard sound boards, Tandy sound; joystick recommended; $54.95

L'EMPEREUR

By Barry Brenesal

SO YOU WANT TO STICK YOUR hand in your jacket, wear a hat cocked to the side, and conquer everything in sight? No problem. Nothing's easier than replaying a bit of history by stepping into Napoleon Bonaparte's boots. Just sit down, Monsieur, boot up Koei's historical simulation L'Empereur, and everything else is taken care of for you. Of course, you'll have to deal with rebellious peasants, incompetent administrators, epidemics, lack of supplies, enemy embargoes and alliances, and poorly trained, disloyal troops — but who cares? You're Napoleon! Live for glory! And save the game regularly.

L'Empereur



Battles are fought over a hexagonal map, with icons representing units.

A quick glance at the main map is all it takes to see who's on top. The Tricolor flies over both France and Italy already.

You may have to watch historical accuracy fall by the wayside of the Empire in L'Empereur, but you'll enjoy the rousing picture this game paints of a Europe in the throes of revolution, counterrevolution, and continental conflict.

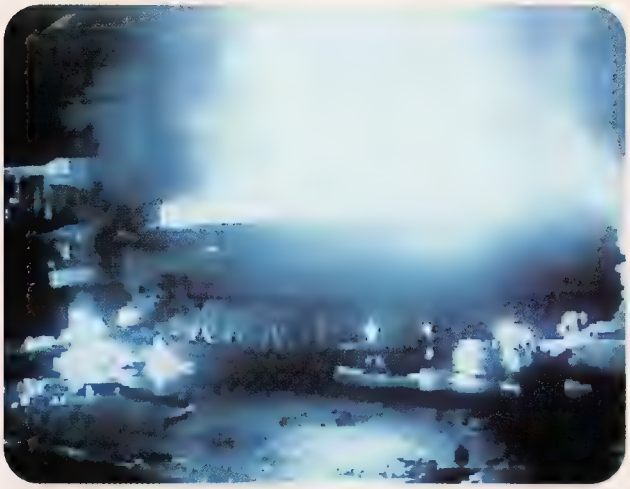
From Bonaparte to Bonaparte's Boys

L'Empereur, the latest historical simulation from Koei, is the toughest to beat. It's the first one set outside medieval Asia. There are four successive scenarios to L'Empereur; you can play them in order or start anywhere. The first plunks you down as Napoleon in one of Europe's most turbulent periods, shortly after Bonaparte becomes commander of French forces in Marseilles. You have to train your troops, choose your best officers, and lead France to victory on the battlefield. After several successes you're appointed commander in chief, and you journey around the countryside, finding other distinguished generals and waging still more war.

You then receive a triumphal welcome in Paris, and become first consul. Suddenly, you're much more powerful — you can move cannon, promote and demote officers, set taxes, trade with your allies, sign treaties, and declare war. The last scenario sees you crowned emperor, and forces you to deal with one of Napoleon's tragic flaws: his relatives. Napoleon tried to assemble a dynasty of European rulers from among his relatives and in-laws, but they ranged from the passable to the completely incompetent. You can have them advance loyalties, distribute goods, or declare war, but remember that although they may be in charge, they're strictly second-rate. Let your really good fighters handle the battles, and keep the Bonaparte Boys out of the line of fire.

Take Command

War in L'Empereur uses Koei standbys from several earlier games — infantry, cavalry, and artillery, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Cavalry moves the fastest and carries the heaviest punch, but it costs a lot to equip. Infantry builds bridges across rivers, and blows them up. Artillery is slow and weak when under attack, but it lobs shells and puts the enemy's ranks into turmoil, effectively knocking out distant opponents for



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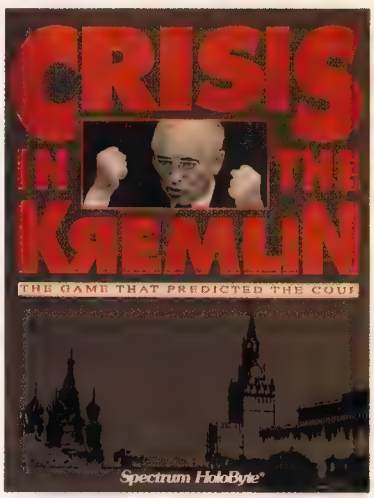

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a round or more. As in previous Koei games such as Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Gengis Khan, L'Empereur battles appear on a hexagonal map, with counters representing the opposing forces.

Combat morale plays an important part, as well. A charismatic officer can rally shocked troops into another charge, while some mumbling paper pusher is left on the field in midspeech, his army hastily retreating. Your commanders are graded *A* to *D* in leadership, as well as in how they handle each part of the army. Napoleon himself rates only mediocre in cavalry, but receives an *A* for leadership, infantry, and artillery.

L'Empereur isn't just about lobbing cannonballs and making speeches. It's also about making decisions, both in war and in peace. Another series of evaluations shows how your officers perform when administering affairs of state. Talleyrand, for instance, receives a solid *D* on the battlefield (few disabled former bishops have made inspiring generals), but he gets an *A* for both politics and finance. These are important qualities when negotiating treaties.

Don't expect detailed realism in these thumbnail ratings. They reflect some general truths about the people involved, but are better seen as another challenge to the game. They can even take on some life of their own as a game progresses. A good administrator's profile may suddenly appear on screen, along with an ill-tempered comment requesting additional ships or troops. Use your subordinates poorly, and you'll end up freezing your medals off in some Russian jail. Use them wisely, and you change the course of history, creating a Europe that speaks French from Calais to the Crimea.

L'Empereur is the first game in the Koei line to include mouse support. Its music track features several good battlefield tunes. (When you're in a particular city, the melodies reflect their nation of origin.) Some of the choices are a little odd, like the boulevard accordion tune that represents France, but the score is very good and, overall, enhances the simulation's mood.

The only problem with L'Empereur is the same problem that besets most other Koei games. The computer players employ a strategy that gradually builds up huge forces, creating a stalemate-like scenario. Secret negotiations and battle cease, and a "perfect" state of armed cold war exists. While you can triumph by maneuvering manpower and supplies, the unexpected strike and swift turn of fortune are gone.

Regardless, L'Empereur is an interesting, frequently exciting addition to the simulations shelf. With such a broad subject as the Napoleonic period, Koei can be excused for sacrificing history on the battlefield in favor of a bold, vivid portrait of waging war in all its political, economic, and human complexity.

Koei has succeeded in claiming Europe as its own, something not even the Little Corporal managed to pull off.

Koei Corp., One Bay Plaza, Suite 540, 1350 Bayshore Highway, Burlingame, CA 94010, (415) 348-0200; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 2.0 or later; EGA, VGA, MCGA; supports AdLib sound board, mouse; $59.95

CASTLE OF DR. BRAIN

By Cynthia E. Field

IT'S AS IF CHRISTOPHER LLOYD in *Back to the Future* had advertised for a lab assistant. And you had the temerity to answer the ad.

Somebody's gotta do it. Somebody's gotta take the tour through Castle of Dr. Brain, the flagship title in Sierra's new series of mind ticklers. Whether you're a kid 10 years old and up, or just a kid at heart who enjoys gray-matter gymnastics, offbeat humor, animated 256-color graphics images, and weird synthesized music, you're going to have the time of your life at the Doctor's office.

Help Wanted

Dr. Brain's castle comes packed with a slew of mental muscle builders, nearly three dozen puzzles that stretch throughout the stone highrise's 15 chambers. These far-flung challenges range from cuckoo clocks to computer circuits to constellations. If variety is the spice of life, get set for an overdose of seasoning.

You make your way through the good doctor's house, starting, naturally enough, with the first floor. Among the games there waits *Math Marvel*, which challenges you to calculate target answers by matching standard mathematical operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) with appropriate numerals from an attractive graphics matrix. Complete puzzles like this and you not only gain access to adjoining rooms, but you also boost your score and earn hint coins. These objects let you buy clues when you're stymied by the castle games featuring a coin-slot icon. Finishing a puzzle sometimes means garnering fragments of secret code, or collecting magical objects such as the ruby key, which unlocks Dr. Brain's desk drawer.

Second-floor puzzles test your ability to follow directions. You struggle to complete a circuit board, convert numbers to binary (where decimal 16, for instance, is represented as 10000), and maneuver a robot through a maze. Toggling the appropriate switches in the maze is crucial, or the robot gets sucked into a blinking yellow light and sent back to the beginning. Castle of Dr. Brain claims no victims, and offers no violence — a bounty for parents looking for games that excite without explosions. (There's conflict, though; you get to free a hostage.)

Puzzles on the third floor include verbal games such as word searches and acrostics. When you complete the tangram puzzle successfully — rotate

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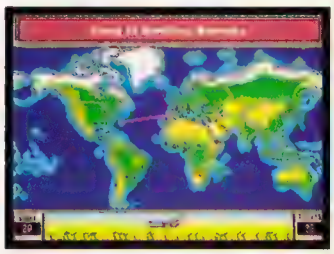

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and place geometrically shaped puzzle pieces to receive the password — you head to the jigsaw room, a museum-style chamber filled with imaginative items such as a knight's helmet, a teddy bear, and a unicycle. Enter the *Doce Omor*, the attic code room where, among other things, you play a hangman-like game before descending to the basement and playing the astronomy puzzles that live down there.

Castle Transit

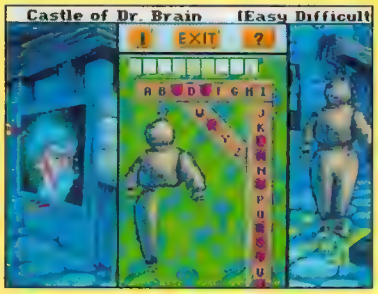
One sure-fire Dr. Brain puzzle is the castle's wacky elevator system. To move from one floor to the next, you must negotiate four 3-D elevator levels, each featuring a first-person point-of-view perspective. Rather than nudge a diminutive computer character through the maze, you see everything as if you were caught in the grid yourself. You can move in any of six directions, but you can't go through walls, ceilings, or floors, one of the few predictably normal things about this castle. Barriers such as these abound, particularly at higher difficulty settings, so advancing to any elevator level usually means backtracking to at least one other level first.

Castle of Dr. Brain sports standard Sierra icons such as the look (eye) icon to peruse the playing field, the inventory (bookbag) icon to keep track of things you've found, and the action (hand) icon to select objects, open doors, and poke around. The screen cursor changes shape to reflect the icon selected. Swapping icons is as easy as selecting from the menu bar at the top of the screen or clicking the second mouse button.

You call for help in the same way, simply by selecting the help (question mark) icon or by dropping a hint coin into an available slot. The program offers three difficulty levels — novice, standard, and expert — and you can save unfinished games. And the Castle gives you plenty of positive verbal feedback. Don't expect normality from the doctor, though. No "nice job" or "good for you" accolades here. Dr. Brain's more likely to offer heady congratulations such as "You have just won the lovely kitchen ensemble and a year's supply of Turtle Wax."

Castle of Dr. Brain

Get the big picture by unscrambling the jigsaw room.



Familiar games in unfamiliar places spell F-U-N for Dr. Brain's lab assistants.

You can play Castle of Dr. Brain with either a keyboard or a joystick, but you'll prefer a mouse. The game's hefty memory requirement — 570K free — means you may have to create a Sierra boot disk to run the program if your PC is memory light, or if you cram its RAM full of memory-resident programs. Instructions for creating such a boot disk are included in the user's guide.

Good for Your Head

You sure won't find any brain-dead drill-and-practice software stuff here. Corey Cole — Castle of Dr. Brain's designer/director/lead programmer — explains that although he was inspired by brain-teaser books and magazines initially, he realized quickly that such flat, black-and-white, paper-based activities were no match for the colorful, animated, and wacky world the computer can create.

Although the words *fun* and *learning* are too often contradictory, not complementary, mess around in Dr. Brain's castle and you'll change your mind about educational software. Sierra's latest will convince you that jazzing up logical-thinking and skill-building activities with a dose of wholesome craziness is as easy as ringing a castle doorbell. Besides, who could ignore Dr. Brain's pink plastic lawn flamingos?

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible, 286 or higher; 640K RAM; VGA, MCGA (256-color); supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, PS/1, Roland MT-32, LAPC-I, CM-32L, Sound Blaster, Thunderboard sound boards; mouse or joystick recommended; off-disk copy protection; $49.95

MONKEY ISLAND II: LECHUCK'S REVENGE

By Peter Olafson

IF YOU THOUGHT SECRET OF Monkey Island was a barrel of laughs, just wait 'til you see the sequel. Monkey Island II: LeChuck's Revenge is a real scream.

It's not often that you see a press release paraphrased in a review (okay, maybe in some other game magazines), but this time it seems pertinent. In the one that accompanies Monkey Island II, designer Ron Gilbert says that the company had to make a sequel because it

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couldn't fit all the jokes into the first game. This I believe.

5000 Bottles of Beer

Monkey Island II finds Guybrush Threepwood on Scabb Island (rather smaller than the original game's Melee) and down on his uppers. The hero, repeating *ad infinitum* the tale of his spritzing the ghost pirate LeChuck at the end of the first game, has turned into the community bore. He's still mooning over Governor Marley from the first game, at whose mere mention Guybrush becomes all sensitive and in whose presence he's downright Ralph Kramdenish. Once the game starts, he's shaken down quickly by LeChuck's pint-sized former henchman, who runs Scabb Island with an iron fist. (Danny DeVito gets the role if someone ever turns this game into a movie.)

While getting rid of Largo — the game's first quest — Guybrush manages to hand over the stuff from which LeChuck will be restored. Good going, pal!

Explaining how funny LeChuck's Revenge is gets a little ticklish, as it's no fun to spoil the good times you'll have pulling out all the stops and seeing how much has been packed into the game. Okay, okay, you twisted my arm!

The game opens on Guybrush, once again, boring the tears out of a pair of pirates around a campfire. You can go back and have him bug them again — even getting them to sing songs. After one little ditty and some talk of dirty songs about Governor Marley, it seems they only know *500 Bottles of Beer on the Wall*. At least you to pick the number of bottles. I started at 5000, and the pirate proceeded to do it. Well, it looked that way. I let him get down to 4975 (and counting) before I pulled the plug.

At another point, you'll come across a useful bucket. Naturally, you can't just pick it up. You must ask its pirate owner if you can have it — and so ensues a minor verbal *tête-à-tête* that recalls nothing so much as the exchanges between Bart and Homer Simpson ("Can I, Dad?" "No." "Can I?" "No." "Can I?" "No.")

Monkey Island II's philosophy seems to be to take everything as far as it can go, and then push it even further. It works magnificently, owing partly to the designer's willingness to make fun of anything (not least Guybrush himself), the extensive dialogue, and an exquisite sense of timing. The pauses have just the right pregnant length.

The feel of the new game is much the same as the original's. That's great. It's as friendly as LucasFilm's point-and-click adventure-game system — which now uses icons instead of object names. Lots of the folks who populated the first game

Monkey Island II: LeChuck's Revenge

Guybrush is in the clink.

•Selling your old clothes to make circus tents?
•Melting down your silverware to build an oil pipeline?
•Renting yourself out to ship captains as ballast?
•Selling advertising space on your stomach?
•Oh really? What's that?

The island is called Phatt, and so is the governor.

are back for the sequel — the three dumb pirates and their rat, for instance. There's a wealth of dialog to explore and re-explore. And as in Monkey Island, you're not backed into a corner. You'll rely on your wits without being trapped by your shortcomings. And, believe me, it's fun.

Hit Time

Monkey Island II is certainly a better-looking game. The original was first released in EGA; II debuts in gorgeous VGA. The screens seem on fire with color, the animation and scrolling are fluid, and the scaling — Guybrush's ability to grow smaller as he recedes into the background and larger as he comes forward — seems to have been improved. This is a hit in the making.

The sound is supposed to be super, as well — featuring a new technique that makes music and effects sensitive to the action being performed — but it wasn't in place in the beta version I played. Also planned, but not available for preview, was a new ability to set the level of difficulty, with different puzzles for each level and even different puzzles in the same level from game to game. LucasFilm's graphics adventures have always featured multiple solutions to puzzles, but let's face it — you're unlikely to go back and play a game again unless it's substantially different from game to game. If Monkey Island II pulls this off, it'll be a major coup.

But the greatest achievement here isn't technical. It's creating a game, a bizarre little universe, actually, that somehow works, rather than simply being bizarre and cold.

You come away liking all these foolish people, rather sad that the game is over, and praying devotedly for a trilogy of Monkey Islands.

LucasFilm Games, P.O. Box 10307, San Rafael, CA 94912, (800) 782-7927; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 640K RAM; VGA; requires hard-disk drive; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards; $59.95

SUPER SOLVERS SPELLDOWN

By Gregg Keizer

KIDS SHOULDN'T HAVE ANY trouble pinpointing Zimbabwe on the map, or where we keep the Constitution. Not now — not when so many popular educational and entertainment games such as Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego? push geography and history.

But spelling? How can kids find fun in spelling? After all, classroom spelling work is too often bogged down with word lists, repetitive practice, and red pencil marks across tests and quizzes.

The Learning Company took on the challenge — perhaps in a fit of missionary zeal — to inject some fun into this vital (if unexciting) skill. The result is Super Solvers Spelldown, an admirable effort that, though not up to the level of the series' earlier games, still lets parents and teachers slip some spelling practice into kids' minds.

Practice, Practice, Practice

If you're looking for the kind of arcade-like action that's marked such Super Solvers games as Treasure Mountain, Spelldown is going to be a disappointment. There may be animated action in Spelldown, but it's minimal and doesn't add much to the game.

What you do get from Spelldown are three traditional word games and a partially digitized spelling bee that any PC — whether it sports a sound board or not — can voice. The word games lead to the spelling bee, both in game play and in fun.

You start by picking from several thematic word groups, such as *Entertainment*, *Sports*, *People*, and *Places*. You can even rearrange the order of the word lists within each theme to prioritize the words that appear in the game. It's here, too, that you edit

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word lists, even make your own from scratch. That extends Spelldown's reach dramatically, because you can, in effect, customize the program with your child's weekly spelling words, or put together a list more appropriate for younger kids.

A four-square menu — Davidson's educational software has used the same basic layout for years — appears on screen. Put the pointer on a box and click, or cycle through the selections with the keyboard: It makes no nevermind to Spelldown, which works equally well with or without a mouse.

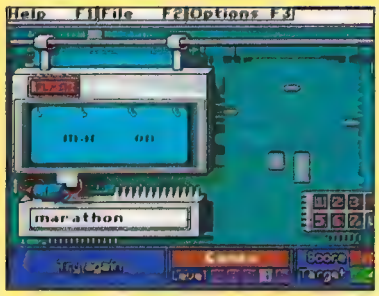
Flash Cards is the easiest of the bunch, and where new kids on the spelling block should start. Spelldown flashes words one at a time, but as soon as you start typing, the word disappears. Spell it correctly and you score points; goof and the program displays as much of the word as you got right. Type *MISSIAN* for *mission*, for example, and Spelldown's smart enough to give it back to you as *MISSI_N* for a second shot.

Next on the spelling journey should be *Word Search*, Spelldown's word jumble. Just like the puzzles in kids' magazines, this game camouflages words in a mess of unnecessary letters. At first, finding the words is simple, because they run only horizontally or vertically. When you move up to the tougher rounds, though, words ramble through the jumble like a slow river.

The third word game is *Criss Cross*, an instant crossword puzzle. Spelldown takes a word list, builds a puzzle, then hands it over. All you have to do is type in the words. But watch where the cursor box goes — it's all too easy to send it to a frame that's already filled.

Preludes all, these games aren't enough to enthrall kids with the wonder of words. If you've been around the educational-software block, you've seen them all, or at least less-colorful variations. Sound effects and some minimal animation in *Flash Cards* notwithstanding, these games don't sparkle nearly enough to captivate kids.

Super Solvers Spelldown



One of the games in Spelldown's quartet is this flashcard-style spelling contest.

Before kids hit the spelling bee, they must work one of three word games. Can you find eardrum in this jumble?

What will capture kids, and what makes Spelldown noteworthy, is its spelling bee. Once you garner enough points — you decide how many at the beginning when you set a difficulty level — you walk into the classroom, up against Morty Maxwell and his spelling robots.

Most of the words are flashed on screen as a soft voice says *Please spell the following flashed word*. The first time you hear your PC talk — without a sound board — you may wonder what ventriloquist has taken over your computer. The digitized voice sounds natural and is understandable. Type the word if it's your turn, or watch the robots spell if it's theirs. Kids learn by doing both.

At first you'll think it's a parlor trick. A total of 300 words in Spelldown's vocabulary are actually spoken by the computer, not flashed on screen. *Please spell the word 'slippers,'* the voice calls out, just like a real spelling bee. (And I should know — I used to run my school's bee when I taught.) The only difference is that instead of talking back to your computer, you type the word.

Miss a word and, just as in a school spelling bee, you're out. But beat the robots (one invariably drops out early, but you have to work at besting the second), and after a return to the word games for another infusion of points, you advance to the next round. From class to school to city to state, you march through spelling bees until you stand in front of the White House for the national title.

The spoken spelling words make Spelldown a charmer. Sounding somewhat clearer than Access Software's RealSound — another sound-effects-and-voice technology that doesn't demand special hardware — Spelldown's narration is generally impressive in its clarity.

Nothing's perfect, though. Younger children may have trouble understanding the speech from time to time; even adults will sometimes misunderstand a word. A repeat feature — part of real spelling bees, where you can ask for the word again — should have been included.

Spelldown fills one of those niches so sadly lacking in educational software. The Learning Company seems committed to beefing up kids' language skills (witness the excellent Children's Writing and Publishing Center), and Super Solvers Spelldown adds to that crusade.

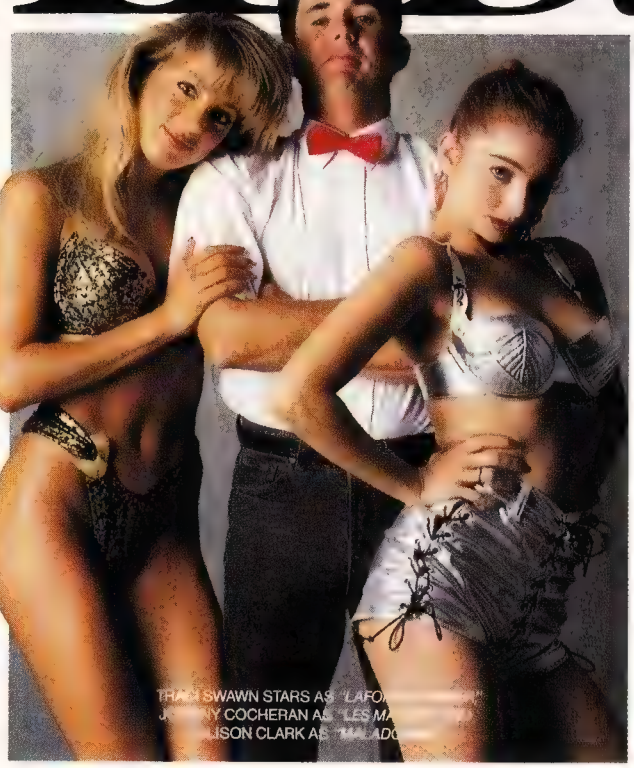
Learning can (and should) be fun, no matter what the subject. Applaud Spelldown for effort, praise its technical achievement, and recommend it to your kids. It may well be the beginning of spelling with a smilee . . . smille . . . smile. ❑

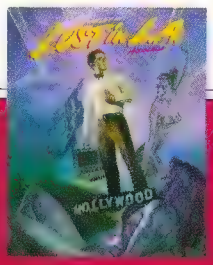
The Learning Company, 6493 Kaiser Drive, Fremont, CA 94555, (800) 852-2255; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 512K RAM (640K for Tandy); DOS 2.0 or later; CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards; mouse optional; $49.95

"SHE STOOD NAKED,

HER WET BODY BATHED IN BEVERLY

HILLS MOONLIGHT. THE STRANGER CREPT OUT FROM THE SHADOWS TOWARDS THE POOL. LIKE THE STARLETS WHO HAD VANISHED BEFORE HER, SHE WAS OBLIVIOUS TO HIS MENACING PRESENCE. HER SCREAM WAS NOT HEARD." THE HIPPEST STARS IN HOLLYWOOD ARE BEING KIDNAPPED. AND ONLY ONE MANLEY CAN SOLVE THE CRIME OF THE CENTURY. *LES MANLEY IN LOST IN L.A.*™ PLUNGES THE HERO OF *SEARCH FOR THE KING*™ INTO A MEGA-MYSTERY THAT SPANS ALL OF LA LA LAND. MEET GORGEOUS BABES, BODY BUILDERS, ROCK STARS, OUT-OF-WORK ACTORS—





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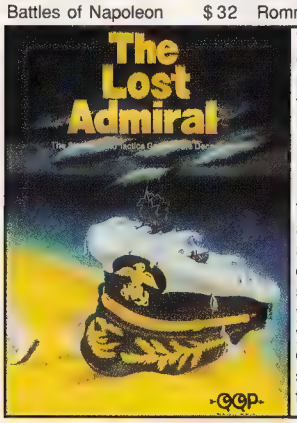

'LOST ADMIRAL' from **QUANTUM QUALITY PRODUCTIONS** is a turn based production naval strategy game. Features 9 scenarios, a random map scenario, 15 campaign games, flagships with special abilities, very strong artificial intelligence, in depth officers ranking system, accumulates your career history as you play, 2 player option, and sound board support. In short better than **EMPIRE.** **$34**

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'WORLDS AT WAR' from **RAW SOFTWARE** is a game of naval combat on a galatic scale. Simple in concept, you can play the tactical study for an hour or the campaign game for a weekend. Features include hidden movement, random map generation, design your own task forces, capture planets to build more units. **CGW** said "...like **EMPIRE**, what this game has is play-value". **$29**

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'HOME ALONE' from **CAPSTONE** is an action game based on the movie. You play Kevin trying to foil Harry & Marv. You hurry to create traps & pitfalls from the attic to the basement. Your tools are common household items. Soon Harry & Marve appear for the chase. You attempt to lead them into your traps. Features digitized sound & graphics in 256 color VGA, with sound board support. **$27**

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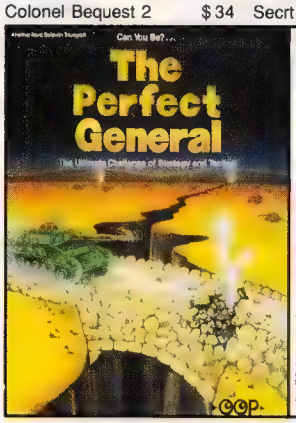

'PERFECT GENERAL' from **QQP INC** is a turn based ground war game. Features 12 years of play testing, great maps in VGA, easy to use mouse or keyboard interface, 14 scenarios, very strong artificial intelligence, hidden movement, line of sight option, in depth player ranking system, saves your career history as you play, 2 player option, modem play, sound board support. **$34**

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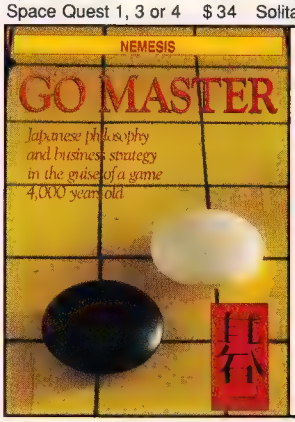

'NEMESIS GO VER 5' from **TOYOGO** is the ultimate computer **GO** program. With the simplicity of checkers and the complexity of chess, **GO** is both an enjoyable recreation and a serious strategy game. **GO MASTER** is a basic GO player and tutor. **DELUXE TOOLKIT** adds complex corner openings, improves tactical play, adds game diagraming, & the ultimate tutor. **GO** is 4000 years old. **$39**

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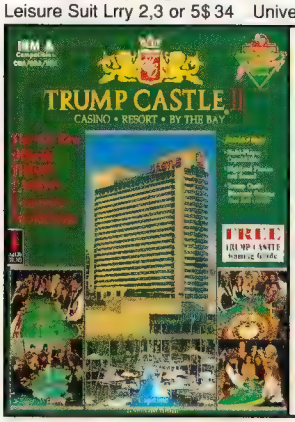

'TRUMP CASTLE II' from **CAPSTONE** puts you in Atlantic City at the Trump Castle Casino Resort with actual digitized images and sound from the casino itself. Features include 256 color VGA graphics, sound board support, digitized animations and multiplayer capability for six gambling games, baccarat, blackjack, craps, roulette, video poker, and slot machines. **$32**

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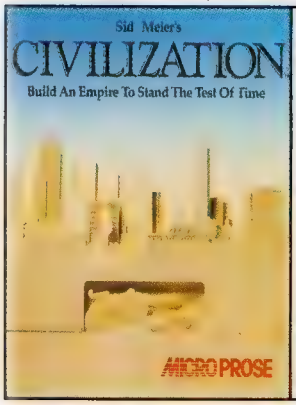
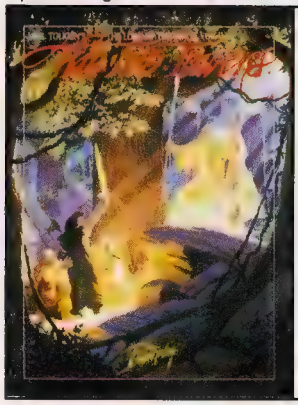
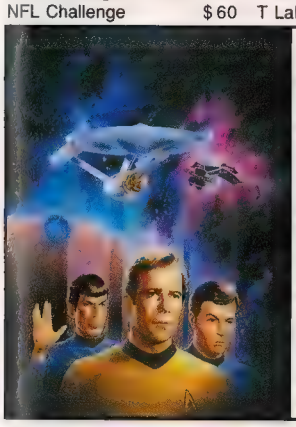


'CIVILIZATION' from **MICROPROSE** "is a competitive multi-player strategy game with a great deal of replayability" **CGW**. You explore cities, continents, and the world in an **EMPIRE** like way. You make economic decisions prioritizing technological growth in order to advance your civilization more rapidly than the other players. The best of both **SIMCITY** & **EMPIRE**. **$39**



'THE TWO TOWERS' from **INTERPLAY** is a roleplaying game based on Book 2 of the **LORD OF THE RINGS**. Battle orcs, trolls, wargs, ghosts, & oliphaunts. Travel through Fangorn Forest, over mountain passes, past the fortress cave complex, through the marsh and arrive at the two towers. Features automapping, digitized speech, point & click interface, 256 color VGA & sound board support. **$37**



'STARTREK: THE 25th ANNIVERSARY' from **INTERPLAY** combines a realistic 3D space flight simulator with an in depth role-playing game. Pilot the Enterprise through a simulation similar to Wing Commander. Discover dozens of planets, beam down to explore them. Each planet with its own unique adventure. Features point-and-click, 256 color VGA & adlib support. **$36**

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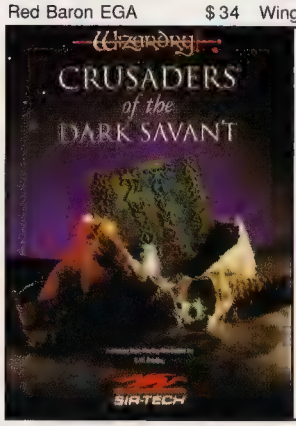

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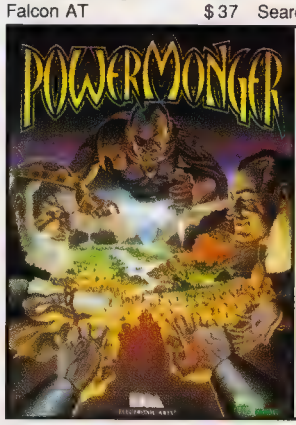

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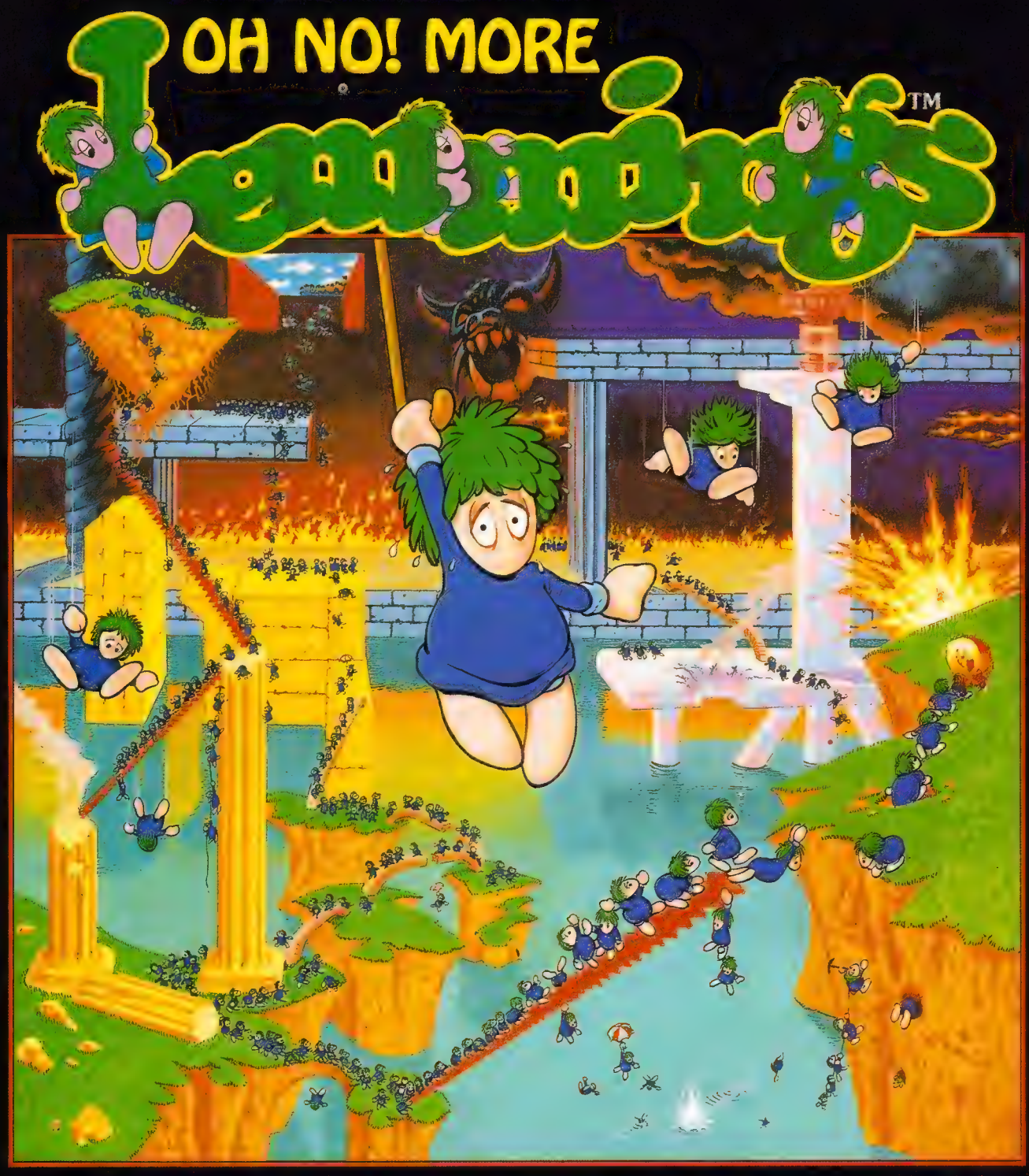

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4D BOXING

By Wayne Kawamoto

"I coulda been a contenda!" If you think you could have stepped into the ring like Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, but you didn't want to spoil your good looks, here's your chance. Electronic Art's 4D Boxing uses the great equalizer — the joystick — to put you in the middle of the boxing ring.

Once you get past the blocky look of the boxers, 4D Boxing isn't only exciting, it's first-rate PC fisticuffs. Its animation — based on the same sort of filled-polygon graphics images found in flight simulators — is striking as it mimics human motion. The results are natural movements modeled after those of a real boxer. A technical knockout, 4D Boxing is the first boxing game that qualifies more as a simulation than as an arcade game.

Picasso Never Boxed Like This

4D Boxing's fighters may look like geometric Picasso-inspired humanoids, all triangles and squares, but just because these guys look funny, don't underestimate them. That square-headed fighter may just send you to the canvas, and make you stare at the ceiling like Michelangelo.

Your boxer can perform a variety of standard boxing maneuvers or indulge in some fancy showboat stuff as did the Muhammad Ali of old. Using the keyboard or the joystick, you'll throw jabs, right crosses, and hooks. Some of the brazen and flashy moves are bolo punches, shuffles, and flurries. In boxing, where it's indeed better to give than to receive, you've got to do more than just hit. A tap on the keyboard or a twitch of the joystick, and you can block shots, bob, and weave.

The detail in 4D Boxing is amazing. Hit your opponent, and his head snaps back. Hurt him, and his eyes droop and knees wobble. After a knockdown, your opponent will stand up partway, trying to get the full benefit of the ten count. When he stands, you'll see him shake his head to clear his senses. If your opponent goes down for the count, you can even make your boxer dance in triumph.

What You See

A wide variety of camera views helps you stay on top of the action. You can look from the top, the side, or a multitude of angles. The side views, popular in other boxing or martial-arts games, give 4D Boxing more of an arcade look and feel. The best view is through the eyes of your boxer, where you see the action in a three-dimensional comin'-at-ya style as you stand toe to toe and duke it out.

Power bars show the boxers' relative strength and stamina. And when you want to relive your brightest golden-glove moments, you can use the playback feature to review the past round.

Once you get past the blocky look of the fighters, 4D Boxing is first-rate PC fisticuffs. The side view makes you feel as though you're watching the action on TV.

4D Boxing's controls are only adequate. In fact, some need improvement. Players could stand more responsiveness in the punching combinations, for example. Throw a right cross or a left hook, and the game sometimes adds unwanted jabs. On the keyboard, 4D Boxing should let you relate right and left punches with both hands. Then you'd have total control throwing

jabs with the left, while you waited for that opening for your killer right.

The boxers tend to stand in one place, which is a minor drawback when you're chasing your opponent around the ring. You have to stop and push the move key between punches. If this were real-life boxing, your momentum would carry you forward naturally.

Some things, though, seem very real. AdLib and Sound Blaster support add excruciating grunts and groans, and the music is a rousing *Rocky*-style score. In 4D Boxing, you can fight one-time exhibition bouts, or go for that long championship season. At the start of your career, you're in last place, and it's up to you to pound your way to the top. Move up, and you can look forward to the fights getting a lot tougher.

The Fighting Factory

"Great boxers are made, not born." That saying certainly applies to 4D Boxing. The gym is a fighter factory, a talent scout's dream. Here, you engineer your boxer by setting weight, height, speed, stamina, and power characteristics. You can even mold boxers from either sex.

4D Boxing is an action-packed game that will appeal to your basic animal instincts. And for some people, it'll relieve stress. Beating the living daylights out of some fictional opponent works better than tossing darts at a picture of the boss.

The action in this game is violent, of course, but that reflects boxing's nature. As Sugar Ray Robinson said, "Hurting people is my business." 4D Boxing gives you intense, top-notch boxing action without the bloodshed. It's simply smashing.

Electronic Arts, 1450 Fashion Island Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 640K RAM; CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy sound; hard-disk drive recommended, joystick optional; $49.95

Victory belongs to the quick in Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos.

NINJA GAIDEN II: THE DARK SWORD OF CHAOS

By Wes Nihei

Not too long ago, when the Japanese whispered the word *ninja*, shudders of mystery and political intrigue overcame anyone who listened. Now *ninja* is a household word, one that even red-blooded Americans (as well as cold-blooded reptiles) find familiar. Everyone's getting into the act. Shouldn't you and your PC join the fun, too?

Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos is an in-your-face hack-and-slash game that has already cut a trail through the arcades and the 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) on its way to the PC. In the best arcade tradition — mindless violence, fast action, and addictive replay — Ninja Gaiden is a great way to while away some leisure time . . . without relaxing.

A Small-Screen Classic

Ninja Gaiden II (which translates roughly as "The Tale of a Ninja in a Foreign Land") follows the NES version stride for stride and slash for slash. In fact, if you've played the Nintendo version (the second cartridge in the NES series), look for the same ninja skills, villains, traps, and challenges; they're just tweaked a bit. And, of course, you'll also find the crisp VGA graphics images that make PC play so dazzling.

If you've yet to draw a sword in this game, here's the line on this tale of revenge. Ryu Hayabusa of the Dragon Clan (the ninja of *Ninja Gaiden*) has come to America to kill the evil demon Ashtar — his father's murderer.

Naturally, if you try to track down an evil demon in America, you cross paths eventually with the CIA. It should come as no shock, then, when Ryu hooks up with Irene Lew, a CIA agent from the previous Ninja Gaiden tale.

Ryu learns that Ashtar is building an evil empire in the U.S., so there's

more at stake than just personal vengeance.

So much for narrative; now you can get down to the keyboard pounding, the area where this game really shines. The game's design is simple. Action occurs across seven levels, each divided into two or three stages. The last stage on each level is a knock-down, one-on-one fight against a monstrous creature. You must dispatch this beast to advance to the next level.

Ninja Gaiden's graphics images are sharp, with slick comic-book styling. They feature vivid colors and picturesque backgrounds. The perspective is a side view of the action, and the game scrolls horizontally as you move Ryu across the landscape. Between levels, good-looking story-screen sequences feature close-ups of Lew, Robert T.S., and other Ninja Gaiden regulars, who reveal clues that are vital for your search.

A Cut Above

Ryu's fighting skills are standard stuff, but he's got a few tricks up his sleeve. He runs, jumps, and slashes with his sword, for instance, and he can even jump up, stick to a wall, and then scale it.

As you dash across levels you find icons suspended in air. Cut these down and you obtain five special weapons, including throwing stars (*shurikens*), fireballs, and an impenetrable fire wheel. Equipping yourself requires some strategic planning, though. Each time you grab an icon, the weapon replaces the one you already have. You must also jump-start each weapon by nabbing ninja-power icons.

To keep Ryu (and your chances) alive, you must monitor his health closely; keep an eye on the life bar, which turns red gradually as he takes damage. When the bar turns totally red, you lose one of your three lives, and you must start again at the beginning of the lethal stage. You'll meet digital death often, but to keep your stress to a minimum you can save the game at any point.

Victory belongs to the quick. The faster you punch a key or whip around a joystick, the better. Joystick input is the way to go, but use one that has two fire buttons, such as an Advanced Gravis. Playing with the keyboard requires sharp reflexes and supple fingers.

The Horrible Horde

Ashtar's minions are a nightmarish collection of popular culture horrors. You'll face lumbering barbarians, knife-tossing Rambo clones, and hockey-masked fiends with sabers. (Doe it sound familiar?) Your foes also include a menagerie of the weird, such as skittering sloth-like things, fire-spitting blobs, and armadillo creatures that roll into you.

You can easily make mincemeat out of one of your adversaries, but their sheer numbers overwhelm you quickly. And they have a knack for appearing at precisely the wrong time. The monsters at the end of each level are tough. They each have unique fighting styles and several moves, and require several sword slashes to destroy.

To kill the Baron Spider, for instance, you must contend with his leaping abilities and the pack of arachnids he commands. You must avoid the spiders, chase the Baron, and stick him several times.

A New Tradition

Ninja Gaiden II keeps game play simple and to the point (literally). Get into this game and you'll sweat and swear in the best mall-arcade tradition. Just be glad your PC doesn't ask for quarters.

Gametek, 2999 NE 19th Street #800, North Miami Beach, FL 33180, (305) 935-3995; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 512K RAM (640 for MCGA); EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, CMS Sound Master, Covox, Roland LAPC 1, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy sound; joystick recommended; no copy protection; $39.95

EARL WEAVER BASEBALL II

By Lafe Low

Baseball's wrapped up for the winter. Teams that ended up in the cellar pin hopes on spring training and opening day in April. The Braves, Pirates, Twins, and Bluejays — 1991 division winners all — hope to have a repeat in '92. If you're a baseball fan, you just have to wait patiently. Or do you?

Earl Weaver II, a sequel from Electronic Arts, can put you on the field today, in the dead of winter. (And it won't be nearly as cold as you'd expect.) With an impressive slate of features and a realistic view of the ballpark, Earl Weaver II bats 1000.

Camera One, Camera Two

You play Earl Weaver II from multiple TV camera-like perspectives. Even the details are rooted in video: When a player comes to bat, you see small statistics boxes, such as those you view on television.

Bat and you look from behind the hitter, just as if you were umping the game at the plate. Once the ball is in play, you see the action unfold from either base umpire's point of view, from a full-field angle, or from a baseline view.

With the default director in place, you'll see the action from the best possible perspective, depending on what's happening. Or you can take the director's chair and change the camera angles yourself. Don't get too ambitious, though; once you start messing with camera angles, you could end up with a close-up of deep center field.

Player depictions and animations are as detailed and fluid as if Electronic Arts had digitized a video of a real game. If the play appears slow

Take a trip to the ballpark this winter with Earl Weaver II. Dynamite animation and multiple camera angles mark it as a game to watch and play. Here, from right behind the plate, watch your man hit.

on your machine, you can adjust the size of the animations to speed things up.

Take a look at the grids to adjust properly for pitch speed, direction, and characteristics before you actually send the first ball flying. (And for an extra bit of spark, turn on the radar gun to see just how fast you're really throwing.) When you're at bat, you'll take off for first base as soon as you hit the ball. If you're cutting it close while base running, you can even slide or dive in hopes of making it safely to the bag.

In the outfield, your players head for the ball automatically, and depending on their simulated skills, catch or muff it. That neatly solves one of the biggest problems with two-dimensional baseball games on computer screens — judging the path of a fly ball.

But once the PC helps you grab the ball, it's up to you to tell your fielder where to throw it. Another grid helps you pick the base to which you're throwing. You may want to catch a runner at home, throw the bum out at first, or nab an overzealous runner between bases.

If you can't connect with the ball, take five for some batting practice. The pros do, so you can, too. Set your batting-practice session at the pro or rookie level, or somewhere in between, just as you command the difficulty level in the rest of the game. If you want to play at the pro level, take your batting practice at that speed or you'll be swinging in the wind as the pitches fly by.

The Real Thing

A slew of other realistic elements add to Earl Weaver II's authenticity. You can opt for injuries, choose time-outs, select the wind angle, and view instant replays in slow motion or regular speed — you can rewatch just about anything you see happening during the regular season. If you find yourself in a pickle, you can also opt for some wise advice from Weaver himself.

Earl Weaver II lets you play against a human opponent or a computer-controlled team managed by Weaver himself. You can split Weaver in two, and have him play himself in a computer-against-computer battle. It may seem like a demo of sorts, but watching a manager as crafty as Earl Weaver may give you some ideas of your own to try later.

Earl Weaver II actually splits nicely into two games. The super-fast stats game (or the stats and physics games) appeals to hard-core number junkies or those who simply want to test their managerial prowess. Games take just a minute or two, so you can see how your team fares over the course of an entire season in a matter of moments.

The way to go, though, is to incorporate everything into your games — graphics images, animation, and mind-boggling statistical detail. After all, you don't buy a computer game to play just part of it. In the full graphics, physics, and stats game, you control all the action — from pitching and hitting to fielding and managing.

The Commish

The **Commissioner's Disk II**, an add-on that works with Earl Weaver II, is a baseball nut's dream. With it you can edit teams and players, change schedules, create and customize ball parks, and change team colors. You can even print baseball cards. The Commissioner's Disk lets you literally create teams and leagues from scratch, and set them against each other in any way you want.

The **1990 MLBPA Player Stats & Manager Profiles Disk**, another add-on, should be out of the dugout by the time you read this review. If EA keeps coming out with disks like these every year, hard-core stats addicts should have enough to keep them happy forever.

Better Than Before

The original Earl Weaver Baseball may have been a thorough and exciting baseball simulation, but in comparison, Earl Weaver II is like going from the bleachers to a box seat on the first-base line.

Head to the microwave and overcook a hot dog, take a beer out of the fridge and stir it up so it's warm and flat, and you'll have a hard time telling whether you're at your computer playing a game or at the

park watching one. Earl Weaver II is grand — a grand slam, that is.

Electronic Arts, 1820 Gateway Drive, San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 512K RAM (640K for Tandy); EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland sound boards; joystick optional; off-disk copy protection; $49.95, $29.95 Commissioner's Disk II, $19.95 1990 MLBPA Player Stats & Manager Profiles Disk

HARE RAISING HAVOC

By Wayne Kawamoto

"I'll save you, baby!" says Hollywood's zaniest accident-prone hare. If you can't name that toon, it's Roger Rabbit — and he's back in Hare Raising Havoc, a wonderful new graphics adventure from Disney Software.

Roger's up to his ears in trouble in a wild roller-coaster ride of a game. The madcap Hare Raising Havoc will enthrall everyone in the family with its excellent cartoon-like graphics images and outstanding sound effects. Although the game is short (some would say too short), what's here is great. Even Judge Doom would like this one.

Forget Your Physics

The plot is vintage Roger Rabbit. Mommy leaves the house, and (unbelievably) lets Roger watch Baby Herman. Of course, she makes clear to Roger that nothing had better happen to the little tyke, or it'll be "back to the science lab" for the hapless toon. But when Mommy's away, the infant plays. Baby Herman takes off in search of the ultimate milk bottle. Thus begins Roger's pursuit to save Baby Herman. Desperate times call for desperate action.

You must get Roger through a series of puzzles in nicely rendered indoor and outdoor settings, and then find the baby before Mom gets back. But all things great and small are dangerous when Roger's around: Goldfish bite like piranhas, mice aren't Mickey-friendly, and household furniture somehow becomes your worst enemy.

You begin in the living room. How do you get out? Conventional logic won't get you far. You have to think like a toon. What would Roger or Wile E. Coyote do? He'd use a portable hole, bounce off the wall, or smash himself to squeeze through a tiny space.

You can also combine unrelated objects in a strange Rube Goldberg-fashion. Forget your high-school physics here. Anything can happen in Toontown where the Goofys and the Bugs Bunnys of the world play.

Listen to Your Director

The puzzles are zany, and there are lots of laughs and even some frustrating moments. Some moves require timing, which means that you may have solved the puzzle, but you haven't figured out the right time to push the button.

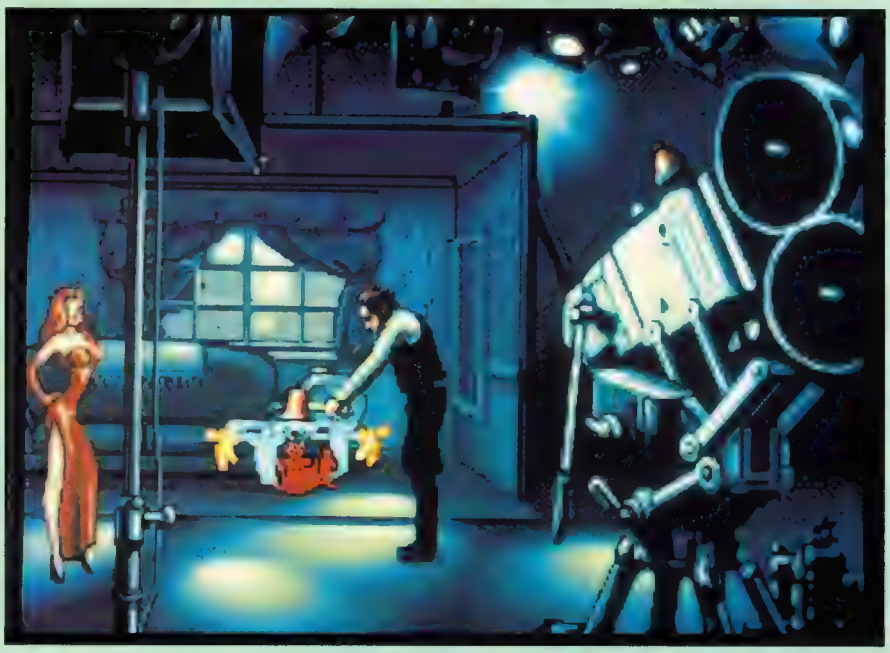
A timer keeps track of Mommy's return. If you haven't found the baby before time runs out, the director, just as in the movie, yells "Cut!" and reads Roger the riot act. Each time you play, you start at the beginning; if you goof you must repeat the earlier sequences, a tedious chore that takes away some of the fun.

Rabbit Noises

Documentation is simple and sparse. Push the joystick or press a key and Roger heads in that direction; another key makes Roger "do something." That's it.

Hare Raising Havoc's 256-color graphics images are excellent, even from the beginning when the introductory screen appears, looking like a *Maroon Cartoon* title card. Roger translates well to the silicon screen. Although the animation is nowhere near what it is in the movies, the graphics images are stunning for a computer game.

With an audio add-on, effects and voices sound as though they were



Step into the world of toons in Hare Raising Havoc. Poor Roger — he can't get the script right, and the director is making sure he won't forget.

taken right from the movie. Disney Software now supports other sound systems, such as Sound Blaster and Tandy sound, as well as its own Sound Source.

Hare Raising Havoc takes some 5 megabytes of your hard-disk drive's space. Installation may be easy, but it's time consuming; loading and installing the game to a 386SX's hard-disk drive took 15 minutes.

Where'd He Go?

Disney calls Hare Raising Havoc an interactive cartoon, which is an accurate description. In a sense, it's much like the three-dimensional interactive adventures you expect from companies such as Sierra and Accolade, in which players control graphics characters and solve puzzles.

But Hare Raising Havoc pales in comparison to the vastness of, say, Space Quest. The games are strikingly different, of course, so the comparison's not completely fair, but it's a fact that players now expect comprehensive software worlds and weeks of entertainment. Roger just doesn't stick around long enough.

Still, Hare Raising Havoc works as family fun. Roger may get himself into a lot of trouble, but he doesn't hurt anyone and he always means well. His self-maiming humor will seem violent only to someone who can't tell the difference between reality and toon. It's certainly much less offensive than the typical arcade fare of shoot-and-scream, hack-and-slash, or whatever you may call it.

Hare Raising Havoc is fun for kids and for those of use who are kids at heart. Roger's still crazy after all these years. Thank goodness.

Walt Disney Computer Software, Inc., 500 South Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521, (818) 841-3326; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible (10MHz 286 or better recommended); 640K RAM; CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports IBM PS/1 Audio Card, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy sound, Sound Source; $49.95, $69.95 with Sound Source

FLIGHTSTICK

MACH III

WEAPONS CONTROL SYSTEM

FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM

By Shay Addams

When the going gets tough, the tough get a new joystick. So I headed for the mall, on a quest for the perfect one. The Thunderstick I'd been using still looked good, but every time I tried to turn and burn, I'd crash and burn instead. I needed help.

CH Products' Flightstick is a smooth joystick that gives you response that's right on the money. (Some joysticks are too sensitive, and turn planes too quickly. Others aren't sensitive enough, so planes turn into mountains rather than around them.) Flightstick is set on a hefty square base that doesn't wobble or slide around the desk, no matter how intense the dogfight. Its fire buttons require only the slightest tap, responding with a quiet click that instills game-play confidence. Your trigger finger controls the main guns in a combat flight simulator, while the function of the second button on top of the stick depends on the game — it often fires your secondary weapons, such as A-10's Maverick missile.

With games that support a second joystick for the throttle (such as Microsoft's Flight Simulator) you can control the throttle by turning a thumbwheel on the left side of the Flightstick. Other wheels let you adjust the trim to ensure that the stick returns to dead center when you release it. Many games let you do this from within the program, but the Flightstick's own option is useful if your game doesn't have this feature. An easy-to-use BASIC program displays numbers on screen, and you turn the wheels until the numbers are correct.

Arcade Action, Top Gun

When you're playing arcade games such as Oil's Well, which require faster moves at more-intense angles, the Flightstick leans toward overkill. You need a shorter stick with more buttons, such as CH Products' Mach III. It has two fire buttons on the base and another on top of the stick. Unlike the Flightstick, the Mach III lets you turn off the stick's automatic return to center, so that you can use free-floating mode. When you need to keep the cursor in a particular spot so that you can blast even more aliens back to their distant dimension, this option comes in handy.

Another stick — one aimed at the hard-core simulator fan who's tired of punching the wrong key while trying to fire a rocket, change weapons, or bring up the map — is the Weapons Control System, a big stick with a fistful of buttons. You plug this Thrustmaster device into the keyboard input on your computer, then attach the keyboard to the stick.

Now you can fly the plane with the joystick in your right hand and work the guns and rockets with your left — it's a cowboy-style, two-fisted approach to aerial combat. No more desperately scanning the keyboard for the *R* key in the heat of battle.

Maybe all you need to improve your game scores is a top-notch joystick. Above, Thrustmaster's Weapons Control System — a big stick with a fistful of buttons.

You can also move the stick forward and backward to control the throttle. A switch determines the functions the buttons control, and settings are provided for most simulators. (The company continually updates the ROM, so it works with Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe and virtually all the Christmas releases.)

Thrustmaster also makes Flight Control System, which is a high-test joystick. (At $99 it's the priciest pure stick on the market.) Set into a flat black steel box, the grip has a rugged military look and feel. Unfortunately, you really have to lean on it to bank an airplane in a simulator.

Besides the trigger-style fire button, four more buttons are on board. You can even maneuver the cone-shaped button on top of the stick as if it were a tiny second joystick. Once the developers support this feature, its four positions might be used to control the rudder or to switch cockpit views.

Like those on the Weapons Control stick, the other three buttons' functions depend on the individual game. The Thrustmaster model was even more effective than the Flightstick, but the extra $20 on its price tag may persuade you to wait until it's more widely supported by game developers. (The latest Chuck Yeager Air Combat and the initial release of Falcon 3.0 will support the extra buttons, and support is expected in Dynamix and Velocity products, as well.)

The Bottom Line

In a store that kept a dozen models on the shelf and out of the boxes, I spent an hour trying them all. I settled on the CH Flightstick, not because it looks like the stick in a real jet, or because it has tactile- and audio-feedback fire buttons, but simply because with it in my hand, I scored in A-10, Yeager Air Combat, and Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe. After all, isn't that the bottom line?

CH Products, 970 Park Center Drive, Vista, CA 92083, (619) 598-2518; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; requires game port; $79.95 Flightstick/IBM PC or compatible, $74.95 Flightstick/Tandy, $49.95 Mach III

Thrustmaster, 705 Southwest Ellis, Lake Oswego, OR 97034, (503) 697-3200; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible (Weapons Control System/AT or higher); $99.95 Weapons Control System; $99.95 Flight Control System

LEISURE SUIT LARRY 5

By Bernie Yee

Les Manley's even tackier rival is back. That man about town, that testosterone nightmare — yes, Larry Laffer's back for more punishment, more puns, and more . . . wait, this is a family magazine, isn't it?

Promptly skipping over episode 4 (aptly referred to as "The Missing Floppy Disks"), Sierra plunges into Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does a Little Undercover Work, a game that, in a fit of sexual egalitarianism, lets you encounter members of the opposite sex from male or female points of view. Progress is strange, isn't it?

Now that Sierra has gone headfirst into its 256-color VGA game system, with fully digitized sound and music support, you can wallow in all sorts of PG-13 adult situations, as well as less-subtle visual metaphors for your adventuring pleasure. Larry 5 certainly takes advantage of these developments.

Try It On

Leisure Suit Larry 5 puts two storylines on a collision course. Larry Laffer, a computer-cultural icon if there ever was one, works for a porno-entertainment company in Hollywood, while Patti wastes her musical talents in sleazy nightclubs. Behind the porno company are some organized-crime types trying to subvert the moral fiber of America through sex, rock-'n'-roll, and rap.

The Hollywood moguls are running an "America's Sexiest Home Video" contest to uncover the most hormone-driven bombshell among three finalists. In one of the game's weakest plot devices, they decide to do this surreptitiously to ensure that their "affections" stem from their libidos, not

opportunism. And who else to test these hot women than the most unsexy guy in the world, the consummate geek, Larry Laffer? Larry picks up some videotapes and a pocket-protector camcorder, and heads off to find these three Jessica Rabbit-esque babes.

Meanwhile, the FBI approaches Patti to send her on some undercover work exposing organized-crime

Larry Laffer's back with more adult-rated action in Leisure Suit Larry 5. Above, your limo's parked outside one of the many exotic locations you'll visit as Larry (or Patti).

connections in the music business — notably, Des Rever Records (accused of putting backwards messages in records) and P.C. Hammer, the rap star who's churning out music that encourages kids to do all sorts of bad things. After a stroll through Al Lowe's (Larry's creator) version of a James Bondian Q lab, Patti gets a tasteless clean bill of health. As it turns out (surprise!), the man behind Larry's quest for babes and the sleazeball behind the music business are one and the same.

Larry 5 lets you play from both Patti's and Larry's perspectives. As you start with Larry, you must find your way to the airport, then onto a plane headed toward Miami, New York City, or Atlantic City — and the three women. After Larry completes his segment, the story shifts to Patti, who plays out her part. The jokes are tasteless and the characters are out of a soft-porn film, but the action is strictly PG-13.

Most computer game players are male — a good thing, considering that Leisure Suit Larry 5 is written from a very male point of view. And if this game mirrors game-playing society (doubtful), it's an image straight out of late-night fantasies: Larry gets four hot women, assuming he reaches the software's successful climax, and Patti beds at least two men (one of whom just might be that geekmeister Larry). These two make an unlikely pair.

Who cares? Larry 5 is funny — tasteless, but funny. Al Lowe can't resist many of the classic sight gags, and leaves in a shot at V.P. Quayle (though leaves out Pee-Wee Herman).

Sierra's Interface

The Sierra point-and-click interface is standard operating procedure for the company's games. With all its icons and next-to-nothing typing, it's delightfully simple to play. Just use the pointer to manipulate objects, speak to characters, walk to a location, or do just about anything.

Still, having been a fan of Sierra since its dark-day games like Wizard and the Princess, this icon format shoves graphics adventures even further away from puzzle solving. Sierra may be positioning itself for the Sega market, but it's doing so at the sophisticated adventurer's expense. (To which the proper response should be, "You want puzzles, buy Legend.")

To Larry 5's credit, it sports beautiful 256-color VGA illustrations, smooth animation, and a likable soundtrack. And it's certainly easy to play, even easier than the last round of Space Quest. The toughest puzzle is Larry's Atlantic City foray — everything else is solvable on the first or second time through. Larry 5 is user friendly too. It'll suggest that you save the game at certain key moments and won't let you continue without accumulating the proper items. (A free tip: Write down all the numbers, phone and otherwise, that you find.)

Who would have guessed that someone would publish an adventure game that you can finish in a few days? Not that the trend is evil, for by simplifying a game you can compensate by making it a bigger universe. Sierra's setting itself up for that task with its long-term CD-ROM (and now MPC) efforts.

Adventures like Leisure Suit Larry 5 really need CD-ROM to give the genre the size and substance it deserves. Until then, Larry 5 is a threshold product — one that takes up lots of room on your hard drive and shows you a glimpse of what a VGA-equipped PC computer can do.

Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does a Little Undercover Work is an entertaining diversion for Sierra gamers, but it may be disappointing to anyone wrapping up a game like Timequest. But then again, graphics and text adventurers were always strange bedfellows.

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (209) 683-4468; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible (10MHz 286 or faster recommended); 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards; $59.95

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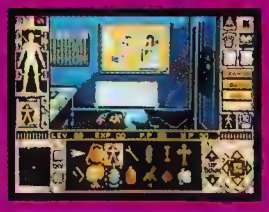

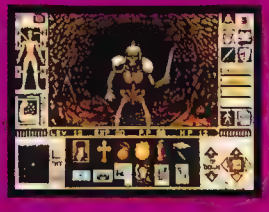

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NIGEL'S WORLD

By Carol S. Holzberg

Kids can explore the world with Nigel as he snaps photos to win a coveted award. Unfortunately, the geography lessons and game play don't quite measure up to the competition's.

Warning! Geography overdose ahead! As if kids weren't already inundated with places, history, and culture, thanks to games such as Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego? (Broderbund) and Bush-Buck Charms, Viking Ships & Dodo Eggs (PC Globe), Lawrence Productions sends yet more geographical greetings from Nigel's World. Like its predecessors (and competitors), it employs a contest — an entertaining one — to trumpet the call to adventure.

Nigel's World may be easy to play, it may offer a point-and-shoot graphics interface, it may be simple enough for even young children to understand, but it doesn't quite measure up to the "edutainmen" standards set by the Carmen series and BushBuck Charms. While the program tries to be interesting and challenging, it simply lacks the sparks that can ignite kids' excitement.

Around the World in 80 Days

Kids become Nigel, an amicable Scotsman whose passion is photography. After entering a contest to win the coveted Diamond Tripod Award, Nigel trots around the globe taking on-location snaps, hoping to shoot the perfect photograph. Nigel's World features 150 countries on seven continents, with 29 of those countries spotlit in detail. Of course, as Nigel travels, he can't help but learn a variety of facts wherever he goes.

Your time is limited in each assignment. You must locate the right destination, take photographs, and return Nigel's *Photo Log* to the contest office before time runs out. If you gets your shots in after deadline, you don't score points, and you don't get a promotion.

To win the contest, you must move up the ranks through four levels of play, from *Shutterbug* and *Shooter* through *Photog* to *Master*. There are 12 assignments at every level. You can expect play to become more difficult as your behind-the-camera experience increases.

At the *Shutterbug* level, assignments involve only continents. You learn your way around an electronic world map and become familiar with oceans, the equator, and the prime meridian. Every continent you visit offers a choice of photography subjects: You decide whether Nigel snaps people, an animal, a landmark, or, if there's enough time, all three.

You'll visit specific countries at the *Shooter* level, hit three nations before completing an assignment at the *Photog* level, and locate and capture specific landmarks when you reach *Master* status.

There's Always Help

If you have trouble finding your destination, you can turn to Nigel's electronic help. You can scan the names of neighboring countries for clues, or, if you're willing to spend points, you can consult the on-screen *Klooculator* for up to five travel hints. The game includes a copy of a U.S. Department of Education companion booklet, *Helping Your Child Learn Geography*, but it's not intended as a game-play reference text; its glossary may be helpful to enterprising players, though.

As you hit the road in Nigel's shoes, significant facts, colorful graphics, and digitized photos appear on screen. While many facts are quite interesting, several seem overly simplistic. When referring to the people of Guatemala, for instance, Nigel's World states only that its people are called Guatemalans and that Guatemala is a country in North America. Actually, Guatemala is in Central America, but all Central American countries have been assigned North American status.

Other facts appear to be taken out of context. The game refers to the Taj Mahal by noting that 20,000 artists worked together to build it; unfortunately, you never learn what the Taj Mahal is. Similarly, Nigel's World points out that Vikings were the world's best shipbuilders, but gives no information about the historical period in which they lived.

At random moments during Nigel's World (from the *Shooter* level on up), you may get a chance to compete in a

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music bonus round after Nigel's completed an assignment successfully. If you accept the challenge, the computer plays a folk song and asks you to identify its country of origin. While correct answers earn double points, incorrect responses cause players to forfeit all points earned during the last successful assignment. The double-or-nothing scoring frequently makes kids turn down the chance, because they're unwilling to gamble their hard-earned scores. Educational games meet with more success if they don't penalize children for taking chances.

From Here to Eternity

Nigel's World doesn't stack up to the competition. Although the game looks good — click-on icons display program options, and colorful images introduce facts and encourage map-reading — the repetitive graphics images, animated travel sequences, and fact screens turn kids off. My third- and sixth-grade testers lost interest long before they completed all 12 assignments for any game level. "It's boring! There's no action. You do the same thing over and over again," they moaned.

Klooculator clues may confuse more than they enlighten. Clues are often too difficult to decipher because the answer fits more than one place. Shutterbugs confronted with the clue *Fly south from here and soar over the equator*, for example, need more specifics to tell whether the continent is North America, Europe, or Asia. Similarly the clue *Go west and you can see the sun set on the Atlantic Ocean* could apply to both Europe and Africa.

The documentation isn't detailed enough, either. There are no references to the graphics objects that affect game play. As youngsters play, icons of people, animals, and landmarks appear on screen. Each picture has a number, but the manual doesn't explain what these numbers mean. It took several rounds of play before it became clear that the numbers indicate how many travel days each photograph location requires.

Despite the software's lofty teaching objectives — geography, social studies, critical thinking, reading, and math — Nigel's World doesn't quite make it out of the gate. Yes, it presents a variety of facts about faraway places, but so does a conventional geography textbook. If the idea is to make learning fun, software must be sufficiently intriguing to get kids playing — and keep them at it. Nigel's World is a few ingredients short of the whole enchilada.

Lawrence Productions, 1800 South 35th Street, Galesburg, MI 49053-9687, (616) 665-7075; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 500K free RAM (slightly less without optional sound board); DOS 3.0 or later; VGA, MCGA; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards; requires hard-disk drive with at least 3.6 megabytes of free space, one 720K 3.5-inch drive, or one 1.2MB 5.25-inch drive; supports mouse; no copy protection; $49.95

BACK TO THE FUTURE III

By Lafe Low

Time travel can be dangerous to your future.

Marty McFly, the extraordinary time traveler, learned that lesson — more than once — in the cinematic *Back to the Future* trilogy. Now Marty's made it to the computer screen, where he steps into a trio of arcade-action sequences with a decidedly Western flavor.

Back to the Future III (the software, not the movie) doesn't hold any surprises, but it's irresistible fun for anyone hooked on saving damsels in distress, having shoot-outs with bad guys, and dashing across train tops.

To the Wayback Machine

Marty McFly's time-traveling DeLorean has gone way back in time — back to 1885, to be exact. He's out to save Doc Brown, the wing-nut mad scientist who started the whole adventure when he assembled the souped-up coupé. Doc's trapped in time, and Marty must save him before he gets gunned down deep in the past.

Before you reach the main menu, you'll see the DeLorean spin in the dirt as it heads for the Wild West. From there you can head to the game or practice your shooting and pie-slinging skills. You'll need to master both if you want to score later in the game. Besides, the target practice is fun all by itself. Level your Colt at a row of ducks or fling pies at faces — it's worth a few grins.

As Marty, you'll have to use all your 20th-century cunning to outsmart the boys in the black hats — Buford "Mad Dog" Tannen and his gang. First, though, you step into Doc Brown's boots, and onto the back of a horse. Clara, Doc's flame, is stuck in the back seat of a horse cart careening toward the edge of Clayton Gulch. You know what happens if Doc doesn't make it on time!

Fortunately, you'll have more chances in the game than Doc Brown had in the movie. You'll need them. As you gallop frantically toward Clara, you must leap your trusty steed over gullies, logs, and a trunk that has fallen out of the back of Clara's wagon. You'll also have to duck more of Clara's belongings as they bounce out of the back of the wagon, or you'll get knocked off your mount. And keep an eye out for a tomahawk or two flung by a less-than-friendly Indian. Watch your back, too, just in case he decides to try to put an arrow in you.

If you want to get ambitious, lean down and pick up some of Clara's things as you ride by. Besides

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earning extra points in the game, that's sure to score points with Clara — if you reach her. You'll also ride over a belt with a six-shooter and some bullets (after all, this is a Western). Pick them up if you can. You'll need them in the next segment.

You're still chasing Clara, but now you're riding through the center of a gulch where cowboys with rifles on one side and Indians with bows and arrows on the other take potshots at you. If there's someone standing in front of you, shoot; he'll oblige by getting out of the way. Be quick, though, for you have to dodge the bullets and arrows fired from the bad guys on the ledge.

Try some Western-style action in Back to the Future III.
Gunplay, cowboys and Indians, saving a damsel in distress — you'll find all your favorite themes.

Great Westerns almost always drop in a train or two. Back to the Future III doesn't disappoint here, either. You get to climb on a moving train and run across the top of the cars. Marty puts a spin on the traditional scene, though, by flying up to the side of the caboose on his jet-powered skateboard. (Remember the one he flew in *Back to the Future II*?)

From there, you jump from car to car to reach the front of the train — all to get the DeLorean going again. Along the way, you send a whole horde of bad guys packing. They throw knives, wrenches, and whatever else they can get their hands on, but you can duck and fight back.

When they're not throwing something, heave a plate to knock them off the train. You can also push them off when the train passes mailbag hooks and water towers. Be careful, though, because these obstacles can knock you down, too.

This Old Hat

In between the action sequences and all your failed attempts at finishing them, Back to the Future III throws in a variety of screens based on the movie. You won't mistake it for the movie, but the Western flavor is a nice touch that hasn't been used much in computer games of late.

Back to the Future III is old hat, but with its thundering horses, gunplay, and charging locomotive, it's an old hat that's hard to take off.

Konami, Inc., 900 Deerfield Parkway, Buffalo Grove, IL 60089, (708) 215-5111; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 640K RAM; CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland sound boards, Tandy sound; joystick recommended; off-disk copy protection; $39.95

CONAN THE CIMMERIAN

By Peter Olafson

If I weren't busy writing this review of Virgin's Conan the Cimmerian, I'd be playing it right now. Conan takes arcade role-playing to new heights of beauty and depths of realism. This is one classy, over-the-top game.

A City Worth Living In

Take Shadizar, the city on whose outskirts the game opens. You've been to a typical role-play city before — pretty disappointing places by and large. They're either wee small burgs — more like representations of cities — or huge and largely inaccessible. Neither is quite realistic, and neither is much fun to explore.

None of that here. The cities of Conan the Cimmerian have been done up in grand style. Shadizar is huge and accessible — as realistic a city as you could ask for.

Its size mimics the size of real life; the city seems to go on and on. It's been built in sand-colored stone along the erratic lines you'd expect in a mythic Middle Eastern-style city — narrow dead-end lanes, ragtag bazaar stalls, balconies and parapets, broken walls and columns, high-rise temples, and more stores than your local mall.

Get the Location

You won't need to map it, but you'll want to label the buildings on the excellent, accurate map that comes with the game. You'll also want to check out the shops for you-are-here-style maps of particular neighborhoods.

This exterior portion of the game, in which you'll spend most of your time, is handled in the ever-popular angled-down viewpoint, and it's largely

The Games: Winter Challenge

"HE HATED THE AUSTRIANS.

THEY WERE FEARLESS, CUNNING AND FAST. FIVE GOLD

MEDALS WERE ALREADY GOING BACK TO KITZBÜHEL. BUT HE VOWED TO DENY THEM A SIXTH. ON THE TRAM, HE TOLD THE REPORTERS. HE WOULD BE THE FASTEST MAN DOWN THE MOUNTAIN THIS DAY." INTENSE RIVALRY. GRUELING COMPETITION. WORLD CLASS SPEED. ALL PART OF THE GAMES: WINTER CHALLENGE™ GO FOR THE BRONZE, SILVER OR GOLD AS YOU EXPERIENCE THE TOTAL RUSH OF COMPETING IN EIGHT CHALLENGING EVENTS AGAINST THE BEST ATHLETES ON EARTH. THE LIST OF FEATURES IS STRICTLY WORLD CLASS: • 256-COLOR VGA GRAPHICS • A STUNNING BLEND OF DIGITIZED, 3-D POLYGON-FILL AND BIT-MAPPED IMAGES • UNIQUE ATHLETE'S-EYE PERSPECTIVE COMBINED WITH SMOOTH, TRUE-TO-LIFE ANIMATION • 8 AUTHENTIC WINTER EVENTS • VCR-LIKE INSTANT REPLAY • TRAINING RUNS OR FULL MEDAL COMPETITION • DIGITIZED SOUND EFFECTS WITH FULL MUSIC & SOUND BOARD SUPPORT • AND IF YOU'RE TIRED OF ONE OR TWO-PLAYER GAMES, THIS ONE LETS YOU COMPETE AGAINST NINE PEOPLE – THE ULTIMATE PARTY GAME. • THE GAMES. FROM THE SHEER EXHILARATION OF THE DOWNHILL TO THE RAZORS EDGE OF THE LUGE, IT'S THE MOST REALISTIC SIMULATION OF ITS KIND. TO ORDER, VISIT YOUR FAVORITE RETAILER OR CALL 1-800-245-7744. ACCOLADE™

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The world map fills up as you go along — travel through Conan the Cimmerian and encounter worlds you never imagined possible.

effective. Indoors and in combat, the perspective shifts to a close-up side-view. And what interiors! They may have been built with a construction kit, but if so, it's been done so seamlessly that the rooms appear as if they were designed individually. They come complete with carpets, shelves, urns with ferns, staircases, countertops, tables with hard-drinking men (some with a great love of the floor), and maybe an amateur belly dancer. And the houses aren't simply gorgeous backdrops, but include objects for you to examine and search, and money and gems for you to pocket.

And that's just the beginning. As you search, you'll find ladders leading down into a dark corridors populated with vicious lizards and great treasures. And as you learn about the ways of this dangerous world, the world map — with just two cities at the start — begins to fill up. There's a ruined city, the evil cities of Zamboula and Larsha, and the capital at Tarantia. This is a big game!

Wait Until Dark

There's a story here, incidentally, largely the same story told in the movie *Conan the Barbarian*. Raiders led by Thoth Amon, high priest of the temple of Set, the Snake God, have leveled Conan's village and killed his wife. The man with muscles on muscles on muscles, armed with only a sword and a few coins, sets out in search of revenge.

The game looks terrific, by the way. On the world map, clouds pass by ceaselessly, casting shadows on the land below. The city streets are crowded with folks going about their business, and who may or may not have anything relevant to tell you. (A bribe option appears only when there's information to be had, so you don't spend money idly.)

The many little quests are arranged cleverly, and it's not necessary to kill everybody — just almost everybody. You're even told where you went wrong when you die. And the game makes semirealistic use of keys, which don't disappear, potion-like, after a single use.

Have You Seen This Before?

I could go on and on. Don't confuse Conan the Cimmerian with earlier Synergistic Software games in the War in Middle Earth and Excalibur lines. There's a surface resemblance, but Conan is something new.

But it's not perfect. The game needs a more sophisticated combat sequence — perhaps something in the style of Epyx's old Death Sword from a few years back, or one with an overhead perspective. (You'll want to see these guys crashing into fruit stalls and through doorways!)

Despite the three sword techniques — one available at the outset, two learned during the game — these arcade encounters are quite basic hack, hack, hack, and thump. It gets tedious pressing the up-arrow key as you watch your opponent's life ebb away in little increments.

Moreover, the single saved game you're allowed isn't enough in a world this large. And when one of Conan's torches goes out underground, you're left in total darkness — not just in the play area, but on the screen border, which holds the icons that permit resuming the game, as well as the windows the icons summon.

Making Music

Finally, while the game runs on a 486 system, invoking Sound Blaster via the AdLib option produced Nightmare Music from the Future. To be fair, Virgin doesn't claim support for the 486 at all, but as those machines drop in price, it's something that needs attention in the future.

To hear the music play correctly, I wound up playing Conan on a 12-megahertz 286 clone, and what a treat it was. The medieval-flavored introduction is one of the sweetest tunes to come out of a computer since Bard's Tale days. At times you'll catch yourself sitting back and just letting it play. Don't pass up Conan.

Virgin Mastertronic, 18061 Fitch Avenue, Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 833-8710; IBM, Tandy, or compatible (10MHz or faster recommended); 640K RAM; EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, CMS, Covox, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy sound; hard-disk drive and mouse recommended, joystick optional; $49.99

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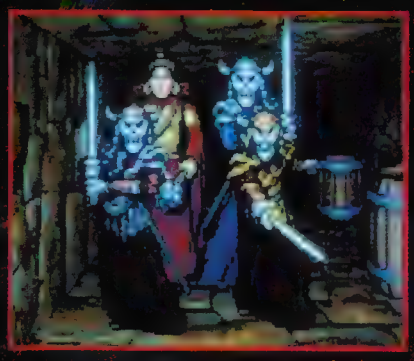

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F-117A NIGHTHAWK STEALTH FIGHTER

By Peter Olafson

F-117A Nighthawk Stealth Fighter: beautiful, challenging, realistic. It's time for take-off for targets unknown.

F-117A really flies. Perhaps that's simply stating the obvious. After all, F-117A Nighthawk Stealth Fighter 2.0 is an enhanced version of MicroProse's fabled flight simulator, the three-year-old F-19 Stealth Fighter, the game that launched a thousand radar blips into the unfriendly skies. If nothing else, it should really fly.

F-117A doesn't just take over the computer. It takes over the computer pilot, too. The room draws in around you — funny how much the average computer desk already looks like a cockpit — to make you forget that it's not really dusk in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. It's time for take-off for targets unknown.

More for Your Money

F-117A's display is crisp — VGA lends the simulator a particular solidness — and the screen updates are so fast that you won't even think in terms of screen updates. Most of the missions are at night (though there's the option to switch to day on training missions), something else that ratchets the game's realism up another notch. Buildings that would look like computer cartoons in daylight's glare become far more real in night's shadows.

The world that flows beneath your advanced aircraft is rendered in astonishing detail, down to the warning lights atop radio antennae. It seems as though every little installation turns up in F-117A. There's nothing quite like taking a low-altitude, high-speed run over a lit-up enemy target and switching to one of the external views just before the flyover. It's even fun cruising down the runway at home, passing other jets parked along the runway. Great idea!

The sharp graphics images aren't the only addition. Naturally, the plane now is the actual F-117A. (The one in Meier's original F-19 Stealth Fighter was based on an impression of what that then-classified plane would look like. MicroProse and the plastic-model makers came close, but this simulator gives you the real thing.)

F-117A adds five new theaters of operation to the four old ones, including, inevitably, Operation Desert Storm. You also get extensive use of camera views and an option to choose a more realistic airplane. The cockpit's been enhanced, and the artificial intelligence that guides enemy forces has been improved.

One unfortunate side effect of this high-tech flight is that you need something at least as quick as the fastest 286 to ante up. The product-information sticker on the box is wrong, but not by much: F-117A is not a 386-only game, but it does demand a 16-megahertz machine.

But criticism? Well, frankly, no, there's not much. The F-117A isn't as much fun to watch in the air as, say, the muscular F-15. The same odd lines and razor-blade silhouette that help make this flying triangle nearly invisible to radar make it visually less interesting on the computer screen. And I never did find an exterior perspective that would let me watch weapons detonating on their targets (a good part of the fun with these things). Finding the right button or combination of buttons to push isn't always easy, and learning the ropes takes some time.

But, more often, such problems are answered by spending time browsing through the superb 180-page manual (though it needs an index) or taking a closer look at the keyboard overlay. F-117A isn't a simple game — try the excellent F-15 Strike Eagle II for a pure, blazing shooter — but it never has been. F-19 was challenging in 1988, and F-117A is challenging now. It's also beautiful. And, yes, it really flies.

MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (301) 771-1151; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; requires 16MHz 286 or faster; 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Roland sound boards; joystick, mouse optional; $79.95 VGA, $69.95 EGA

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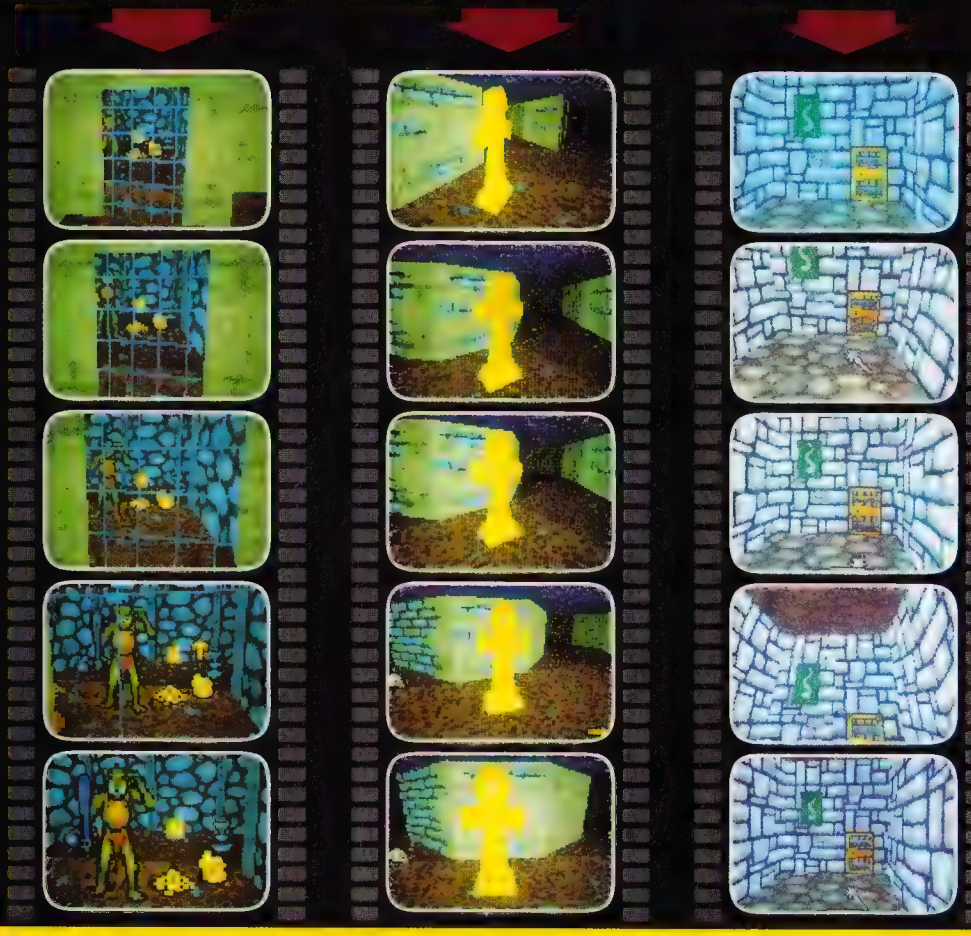
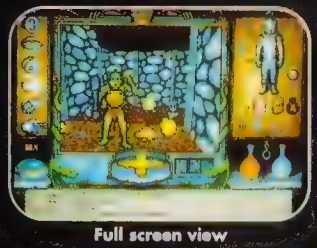


You won't believe your eyes.

Some games can't be showcased with a few screen shots and some descriptive text. *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss* –a game of action, motion and movement – is one of them. We hope this attempt to capture the excitement of the Underworld sends you running to a software store for a look at our demo. Because only there can you truly experience this incredible journey.



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SPELLCASTING 201: THE SORCERER'S APPLIANCE

By Barry Brenesal

It may be EGA, but the sights are dazzling in The Sorcerer's Appliance. You'll also find tough action and an easy-to-use interface, complete with noun and verb menus that make navigation a breeze.

Get back to school! Grab your pens, texts, and spell books, as you rejoin nerdish Ernie Eaglebeak for Spellcasting 201: The Sorcerer's Appliance, at good ol' Sorcerer U.

Sorcerer U, just in case you've forgotten, is a seat of higher learning given over to wild frat parties, beer busts — and the study of sorcery. In Spellcasting 101 (subtitled "Sorcerers Get All the Girls"), Ernie enrolled at Sorcerer U to impress his secret lady love, Lola Tigerbelly, and escape the clutches of his sadistic stepfather, Joey Rottenwood.

Alas, life's problems have a way of catching up with us all. First, Ernie was knocked unconscious at the university, and awoke to find everybody missing. Then his life got entangled with a legendary magical item, The Sorcerer's Appliance. On the way to righting all wrongs, he was forced to star in a production of *Goldilocks and The Three Mud Devils*, fix plumbing problems on the Island of Amazons, and face off against his old nemesis, stepfather Joey.

So much for history. In Spellcasting 201, Ernie encounters a vindictive pledge master who dons a ceremonial chicken suit and burdens our hero with impossible tasks. Fortunately, Ernie gets help from the woman of his dreams — whom he creates with the aid of the Sorcerer's Appliance.

In this wild and wildly funny graphics adventure, glitz matters less than good brain teasers, solid programming, great musical scores, and outrageous humor. Spellcasting 201's back in school. Thank goodness.

Hit the Books

Legend's Spellcasting series is the brainchild of Steve Meretzky, whose earlier credits include the old Infocom hits Planetfall, Zork Zero, and Leather Goddesses of Phobos. His latest Spellcasting release lives up (or down, depending on your point of view) to the same standards set by Sorcerers Get All the Girls. It's lively, clever, and silly, with both nice (G-rated) and naughty (R-rated) modes. (Switch to naughty mode and your computer speaker emits a long, unbelievably crude laugh.) The game is thoroughly enjoyable, although the endless succession of ridiculous names becomes a little much after the first 20 seconds.

Don't be fooled, though. Spellcasting 201 is fun, but it isn't easy. Unlike LucasFilm's Monkey Island series, the humor is completely incidental to completing some of the hardest puzzles this side of the Sphinx. Not only must you gather useful objects to solve plot complications, but you also must find and apply ditzy magical spells. Some of the gems Ernie encountered previously included *Wufbam*, which makes small dogs explode; *Blubba*, which summons a whale; and the ever-popular *Slugbgon*, which makes lawyers vanish. What happens if you hit a dead end? There's no spoon-feeding in Legend's products: Access *Hints* under the main menu, and you're told to call a 900 phone number for help.

If the game is tough, getting to it certainly isn't. In fact, its handsome graphics interface is one of the friendliest you'll find anywhere, inside or outside the gaming world. Legend has latched onto something good, too, with its partial-screen high-resolution EGA visuals. They look great — they're crisp and clear, take up less disk space and load much faster than 256-color VGA graphics.

This interface is even configurable. It can show a picture of your current location, your inventory, or your position relative to the whole university. Click on an object to look at it; click twice to take it. There's also a compass rose for movement, and a keyword menu-selection system featuring all available nouns and verbs — and it's quite a list. The

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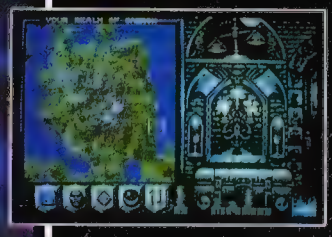

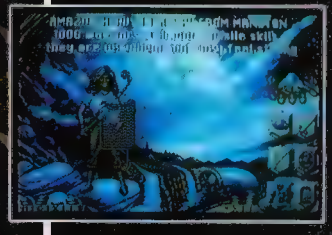

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program updates it continually to reflect new locations and objects in your possession.

Are you tired of menus? Type *half mode* to remove the lists; type *text mode* to do away with everything except plain ASCII script, effectively wiping out several generations of programming improvements. Spellcasting 201 supports both text and mouse use.

You can pick from a variety — garden and otherwise — of adventure games. Some add endless digitized dialogue, live actors, or multiple scenarios with arcade effects. Spellcasting 201, certainly not a run-of-the-mill piece of entertainment, is a lively romp through seldom-walked adventure territory. You're going to get quite an education!

Legend Entertainment Company, 14200 Park Meadow Drive, Chantilly, VA 22021, (703) 222-8500; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 512K RAM; EGA, VGA (hi-res 16-color), CGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color (hi-res black-and-white); supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards, RealSound; requires hard-disk drive; mouse recommended; $69.95

THE TREEHOUSE

By Cynthia E. Field

Up in the trees, the view is great. A treehouse is the perfect place to play and plan. Kids can imagine that their perch is the masthead of a sailing ship, the turret of a faraway castle, or just a spot free from the pressures of parents, school, and bothersome siblings.

Broderbund has created an electronic allegory to the backyard treehouse in its new discovery-learning program, called, naturally enough, The Treehouse. Aimed at children aged 6 to 10, this sequel follows in the footsteps of its widely acclaimed predecessor, The Playroom, which is designed for younger kids. As you might guess, The Treehouse encourages children to poke around an imaginatively bedecked clubhouse where learning opportunities abound. Full-color, animated, age-appropriate graphics images make the software a joy to use, even for those of us who have only the dimmest memories of elementary school.

Like all great software for children, The Treehouse offers youngsters the best of both educational and entertainment worlds. It's fun to explore and it's packed with information.

Sleepyhead

When kids start The Treehouse, they're greeted by a catchy theme song and two sleeping opossums. Click on either the male or female playmate, and you'll head up the treehouse ladder.

Once inside the treehouse, you'll discover inviting toys and everyday items, such as a digital clock that really keeps time. A colorful chalkboard awaits your child's artistic embellishment. Click on the cloud that's out the window, and watch it change shape. Tap the bird's nest to awaken the peeping hatchlings, or press a radio button to play the Treehouse theme song. When you click on the *Today* banner, a window shade pulls down to tell you about an important person born on that date. And you never know what you'll see when you peer into the treehouse telescope.

Other animations include the treehouse spider who rushes to his web to engulf a suicidal fly, and the bluebird who swoops in for the kill when you open a can of worms on the treehouse floor. Subtle humor like this may escape youngsters, but it makes parents chuckle. Because some of The Treehouse's vocabulary may be unfamiliar to younger players, it's a good idea if a parent or older sibling plays along.

When you're ready to take a break from exploring the treehouse itself, you can climb down the ladder and hit the backyard. It's not Biosphere 2, but this imaginative habitat features a winking sun, a chirping bluebird, sleepy squirrels, and a miniature frog pond.

Back inside the treehouse, you can click on the music-synthesizer keyboard or one of the other icons that beam you up to The Treehouse's half-dozen learning games: *Treehouse Theater*, *Road Rally*, *Animal Album*, *Guess My Animal*, *Musical Keys*, and *Musical Maze*.

The Show Goes On

In *Treehouse Theater*, kids animate and print original scenes by completing a play's script (a simple sentence) with elements such as *Who* or *What*, *Does What*, *Where*, and *When*. Choose characters, scenes, and scene-related props from the clip-art illustrations provided. The game doesn't require typing.

Spin the die in *Road Rally* games and move your car an appropriate number of city blocks on the video game board. Land on a happy face and you can earn coins (or poker chips) that count toward the game's user-defined goal. Collecting the coins or chips is as easy as answering correctly the arithmetic questions that appear on screen.

You can play *Road Rally* games with a friend or with Bonga Bot — The Treehouse's resident robot. How do you tell whose turn it is? Just look in the rear-view mirror, silly!

Animal Album, one of The Treehouse's two *Backyard Zoo* games, is a picture database that helps children classify an assortment of animals. Kids learn about characteristics such as backbone, eating habit, and body temperature.

When you click on the backbone icon, for instance, the program describes the trait and displays familiar vertebrates, including a dog, a fish, and a bird. Dive deeper into the game, and more than a dozen backyard birds appear. Select each one to learn its name, or to place the bird

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Let your kids climb into The Treehouse: They'll learn a lot and have fun, too.

in the colorfully animated backyard scene. *Guess My Animal* asks kids to identify which of eight animals lurks beneath a shrub. Just match the trait clues scattered throughout the scene.

The Treehouse's two music games — *Musical Keys* and *Musical Maze* — include a rich assortment of musical-appreciation, ear-training, and music-theory and composition activities. Play the piano keyboard by clicking on its ivories with the mouse or by pressing the keys located in the bottom two rows of the keyboard.

You can even write your own songs by placing notes on the staff. A ready-to-enjoy songbook is included on screen, so you can listen to or sing along with familiar tunes such as *Camptown Races* and *London Bridge*. You can print canned sheet music, or publish your own compositions. *Musical Maze*, a name-that-tune game, challenges you to match a brief piece of music with sheet-music signposts.

Sour Note

The single disappointment with The Treehouse is arguably no fault of the program itself. According to a company spokesperson, Creative Labs' Sound Blaster and Disney's Sound Source let you hear full orchestral sounds in *Musical Keys*. Select the picture of the oboe to hear that instrument's distinctively nasal whine; choose the trumpet to enjoy its characteristically brassy sound. Without a sound board, though, the PC produces only clarinet-like boops — whether you choose the violin, the French horn, or the frog who sings in the animal chorus.

The Treehouse's characters can't talk without a sound card, either. When you click on the portrait of the wise-cracking owl his beak only quivers; the mute possums communicate via cartoon balloons. If you want to enjoy The Treehouse in all its glory, you need a sound card, something the packaging regrettably doesn't mention, though it claims that the program includes digitized sound.

Impressive Curriculum

Rest assured, though, that with or without full orchestral sound and digitized speech, The Treehouse's educational activities support an impressive curriculum: arithmetic, art, biology, computer literacy, language arts, and music, to name a few. Kids who take the time to explore the program's nooks and crannies, who sing along with the accompanying audio cassette, or who participate in the special activities suggested in the *Kid's Guide and Songbook*, will be fascinated by the game's magical interactive nature, and probably won't give its educational value a second thought.

But don't take my word for it. Poke a 'possum yourself.

Broderbund Software, 17 Paul Drive, San Rafael, CA 94903-2101, (800) 521-6263; IBM PC, Tandy, or compatible; 640K RAM; DOS 3.0 or later; EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports Sound Blaster, Sound Source sound boards; requires hard-disk drive with 3MB free; off-disk copy protection; $59.95

WESTERN FRONT

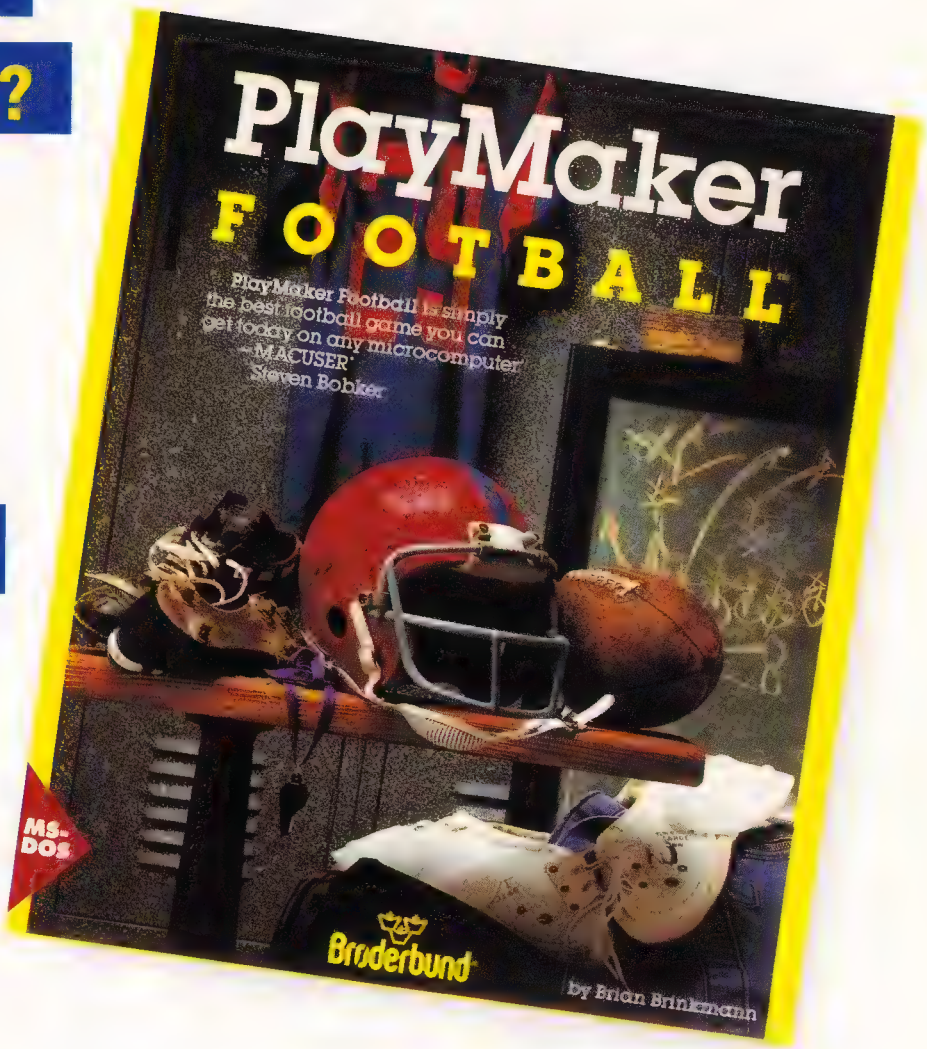
By Ed Ferrell

It was, as Studs Terkel said, the Last Good War. And it was a supply-line war. Shut off the supply of gasoline, food, ammunition, and reinforcements, and the enemy folds like a paper tiger.

Western Front, a grand-scale strategic war game from SSI, is a supply-line simulation that challenges your leadership abilities in the four major Western European campaigns of World War II. Based on the successful Second Front game system, Western Front punishes anyone who dares a frontal assault, and rewards those who cut off the enemy's supplies while protecting and extending his or her own.

Western Front is a must buy for anyone who enjoyed Second Front, and is a good pick for the avid war gamer who has enough free time to tackle an extensive, detailed simulation of World War II command-level strategy.

YOU WANNA PLAY GAMES? OR YOU WANNA PLAY FOOTBALL?



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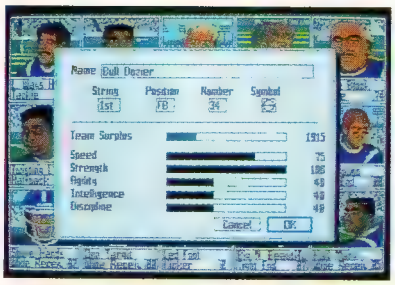

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Combat Management

Within a now-familiar war-game format, you control either Axis or Allied troops in the battle for Italy, Operation Cobra (the breakout from Normandy), and the Battle of the Bulge. Select the *Overlord* campaign when you're ready to go for it all, and command the largest invasion force in the history of the world.

For each of the four scenarios there are different victory conditions, and when you play the Allied side, different cities to liberate from the Germans. You must liberate victory cities by certain dates, so be prepared to issue orders quickly for tank and mobile-infantry attacks, bridge-bombing missions, amphibious landings, and airborne assaults. And there are political consequences for many actions, with only so many political points to spend each turn.

Best played with a mouse, you can also play Western Front from the keyboard. Memory and other machine requirements are steep for a war game, but not out of line with other games these days. Computers aside, a healthy knowledge of World War II's European campaigns won't hurt.

Western Front's box claims a playing time between ten and 100 hours, but the latter number is more accurate. As supreme commander, you give orders all the way down to individual squads of infantry, tanks, and aircraft. (Talk about micromanagement!) Transfer fresh troops to the front. Order direct air strikes on bridges and cities, interdict the enemy's movement, or conduct an airlift of supplies to your forward units.

Gamers should thank SSI for making it simple to point-and-click on individual units, revealing a pop-up window in which you can review detailed information on the make-up of individual squads, as well as a unit's combat experience and overall readiness. Here, too, you create the exact complement of tanks, infantry, and guns that let you execute your plan. The detail here is complex, but because each move represents four days, it takes some time to review everything.

Back to Headquarters

Western Front uses headquarter units to control the flow of reinforcements and boost your chances in battle. Each headquarters is commanded by an historical officer, each with his own effectiveness and political ratings.

These ratings directly affect your troops' ability to retreat without shattering, regain readiness, or issue combat replacements. You can replace a commander (shades of Patton and the slapping incident in Sicily), but it costs you political points. Because all reinforcements enter through headquarters, position them carefully — manage these special units well

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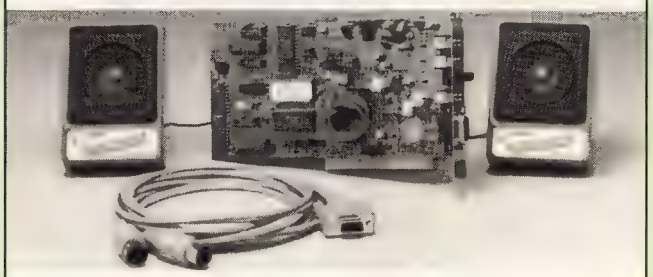

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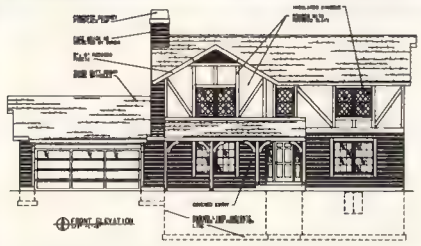

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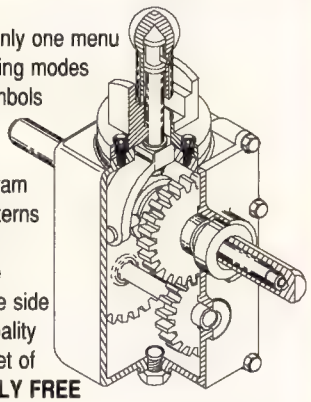

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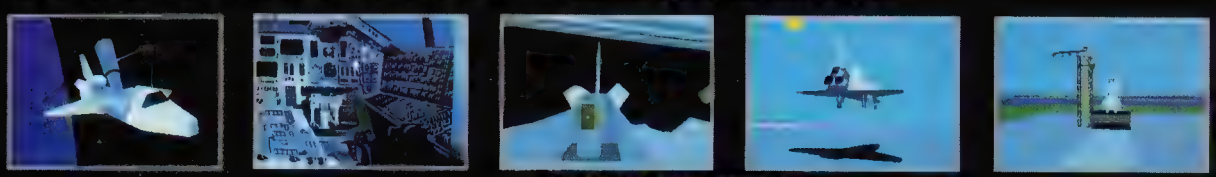

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and you'll assure your troops of their best chance in combat.

The bulk of Western Front's screen displays the maps, which look great, with lots of color adding some splash to the uncluttered invisible hex grid. Switching views paints all enemy-controlled hexes red, and lets you check supply lines — theirs and yours. Another view highlights friendly rail hexes, your fastest way to the front.

Manage your troops and supplies successfully in Western Front, and you'll win the war.

Battle Sync

When you've created the mobile subgroups you want and ordered air strikes you need, begin your attack by pointing-and-clicking to plot troop movement and amphibious assaults. The *Show Plots* command creates a map with solid and broken lines that indicate how your units are ordered to perform in combat, as well as plotting fire, movement, and static attacks. Order some troops to wait one pulse before moving, so all your troops attack in sync.

Combat resolution is quick compared with all the time you've spent planning, but pay attention to the outcome — it's the only way to judge the effectiveness of your strategy. Once a unit can no longer trace a direct line back to its headquarters, it's out of the supply line and vulnerable. Quick strikes and flanking maneuvers can cut off enemy soldiers and cause them to lose readiness or eventually shatter.

You're going to take some casualties, and some equipment is going to get knocked out. Setting matériel types for each production city will ensure the needed replacements. And as the Allied commander, you exercise direct control of the types and levels of all U.S.A. production, too.

A War to Win

As in real modern war, Western Front forces you to plan carefully, execute your strategy flawlessly, and keep those supply lines open. It may be combat management, not combat, but that's what really won the war. ❑

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PLAYING THE GAME

THE GREAT ESCAPE

By Neil Shapiro

Where do you go to get away from it all? If you're an adventure-game aficionado, chances are you head right for your PC. There's something for everyone there. Whether your taste runs to swordfighting or sexual satire, whether you're battling The Mob in Miami or a bunch of malevolent knights run amok, whether your hero's named Larry or Lancelot, when you need a break from routine you can always escape into the mists of the distant past — or maybe just somebody's on-screen hot tub.

You've Gotta Love It

Adventure role-play games often put us into situations we may never face in our real lives. That can involve dragons and tigers, other planets and climes, or villains that make Saddam Hussein look like your Aunt Maude. But few adventure games permit us to examine our own ways of thinking, our own lives, in unique ways.

Although Sierra On-Line's popular Leisure Suit Larry games sell like hot cakes, many people seem to think they're just sophomoric excursions into adolescent fantasy. Although it's true that Larry does get his share of kicks (or almost-kicks) and we do recommend the eye-opening 256-color versions of the games, playing this series means more than just partaking of off-color jokes and pin-up art. I think it goes to the very heart of what humor is and why something that's "funny" makes us laugh.

Leisure Suit Larry's got something for every vice.

My thesis is that when you play Leisure Suit Larry you wind up laughing not just at Larry and his escapades, but at some of the worst and most sexist attitudes many people unfortunately still cling to. By making Larry a jerk, Sierra has made it easy to find humor in his method of "thinking." When you play, you wind up questioning — through humor — certain preconceptions that such a game brings to the surface.

Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does A Little Undercover Work carries a label of "Warning! Parental Discretion Advised." Yet the game contains nothing you won't see on any number of prime-time TV shows. In fact, looking at some of Larry's ideas — because they're treated for laughs and not for-real-with-a-leer, as on TV — may be a way to get your kids to question false values.

In this latest installment, poor old Larry lands the job of auditioning hostesses for the new TV show *America's Sexiest Home Videos*. It's a rough assignment, but somebody has to do it. And who's better suited than Larry? Unfortunately, Larry is unknowingly working for The Mob, and The Mob is trying to put porno on TV. The FBI sends out its best undercover agent — Patti. When Larry and Patti get together, the game starts rockin'-and-rollin' (and not just thanks to the great background music).

Now for a few Larry tips:

• One of the keys to playing Leisure Suit Larry (and any other Sierra game) is to use your eyes — or at least the **eye icon** — to look at everything, everywhere you go. Now, some of the things you'll be looking at are pretty easy on the eyes, for sure, but there are other details not so enticing that you should search out, too.

• You'll find this out almost right away at the New York airport. When you want to put a video tape into your **camera**, make sure it's fully charged and ready for action. Pan and zoom your way to the west-side wall of the terminal where you'll spot an electrical outlet. Put the camera onto the charger, but use the eye icon to keep looking at the camera until it reaches a 100 percent charge. Don't leave home without it. (You'll have to go through this routine at almost all the airports you visit.)

• You may wonder what Patti should do at the offices of Des Rever Records. Take a look around and you'll note a **gold record** on the wall. Take it down and play it. If you still don't have all the information you need, think about this: You know how every so often some group gets into the newspapers by saying that if you play records backwards at different speeds you'll hear evil things? It may hardly ever prove true in the real world, but you're in Larry's world now.

• When you're leaving Miami, your plane back to Los Angeles (where else

would Larry live?) will get into trouble. When the stewardess asks for a volunteer to fly the plane, speak right up. She'll take you to the cockpit, where you'll find numerous controls. Just click the **hand icon** all around and sooner or later you'll find the autopilot.

I must admit that I'd never played any of the Leisure Suit Larry games before. I found this one a lot of fun, and, if you don't have too many hangups, I think you'll agree. Now all I need are the first four installments . . . .

Two-Edged Sword

Here's a first: I'm going to give you some tips for playing a game I personally don't like at all — and yet I don't hesitate to recommend it to you. What's going on?

The game is **Spirit of Excalibur**, from Virgin Mastertronic, and it purports to be an adventure game set in the Britain of King Arthur (or, actually, just following Arthur's death). It's a fine game in many respects —lots of puzzles to solve, beautiful graphics. But for those of us who have studied the legends of the knights of the Round Table, Spirit of Excalibur almost completely fails to capture that true Arthurian feel.

It's a fascinating subject, of course. I've read the original Malory manuscript, as well as Malory's sources, including Wace and Layamon, Chrétien de Troyes, and the *Vulgate Cycle*. I'm probably the only person you know who once taught himself the rare Midlands dialect of Old English solely to be able to read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the original language. (It was well worth it, as the internal rhythms of the poem are lost otherwise.)

And it's certainly true that some modern-day authors, including Mary Stewart in her *Crystal Cave* trilogy, have managed to change certain aspects of the legend without losing it. Unfortunately, I feel Spirit of Excalibur loses the legend — and injects some inaccuracies. (Among other things, Sir Ector, Sir Bedevere, Sir Palomides, and some of the other knights who died along with Arthur in written versions of the legend show up here in good health.)

So for the 1 percent of you who might share my feeling for "The Matter of Britain," I can't recommend this game. But for the 99 percent of you just looking for a good time with your computer, you can certainly find it herein.

That said, let's check out some hints for Excalibur:

- One of the first things that gave me trouble was the close-mouthed **Friar Albert** in St. Albans. He gladly and quickly mentions the sword Excalibur as a way to kill off that pesky giant — but where's the sword itself? The only way to find out is to have Nineve cast a charm spell on the Friar, who will then tell you to check a lake near Oxford.
- Now pay attention here: The **sword** isn't in that particular Oxfordian lake. But this isn't the kind of program you can skip around in; the Friar's information will still prove important in many ways.
- When Lancelot wipes the floor with **King Andred**, search Andred twice, not just once — you'll find the fabled (albeit not in any fable I ever read) "Gaunts d'Poeir" (power gloves).

Give Spirit of Excalibur a shot. But if knights in armor appeal to you, go to the library and check out some books, too. (I recommend Howard Pyle's four volumes on the legend as a good introduction.) It'll lead to a lifetime of reading pleasure, in addition to the pleasure you've found in computer gaming.

The Check Is in the Modem

Here's another great escape — for those times when you're looking for a somewhat more intellectual challenge. Chess, anyone?

Most of the chess games on the market today offer a complete line of bells and whistles — and near-master-level play. At best, they're a way to study chess with an opponent more skilled than you are; at worst, they're a frustrating way to demonstrate that a computer is faster than the human brain.

Masque's **ChessNet for Windows**, however, adds a new dimension: You can play with human opponents via modem or network (and try to "chat" your opponent off guard). ChessNet lacks a tree of moves and an opening-book editor, and the graphics images aren't anything to crow about, but the game offers hints, a built-in opening book, and time-controlled levels.

So check out your chess club for computerists and your computer club for chess fiends. Computers are great, but there's nothing as enjoyable as person-to-person game play.

Send Your Hints!

Don't be shy — mail your tips and techniques to me at P.O. Box 520, Bethpage, NY 11714, and see your name in lights (well, at least in print). Meet you here next time. ❑

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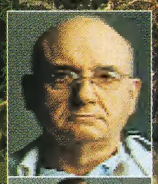

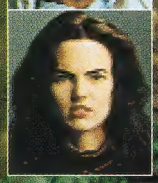

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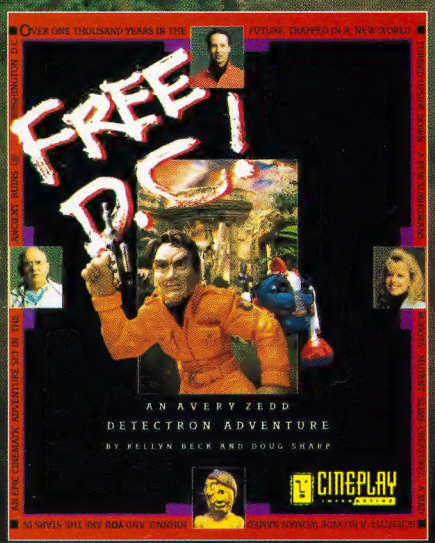

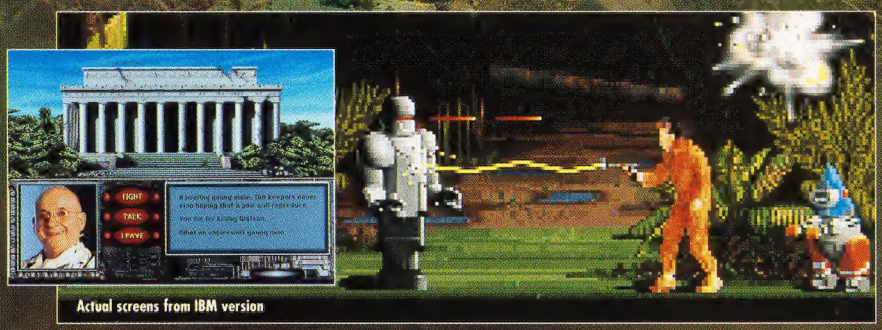

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